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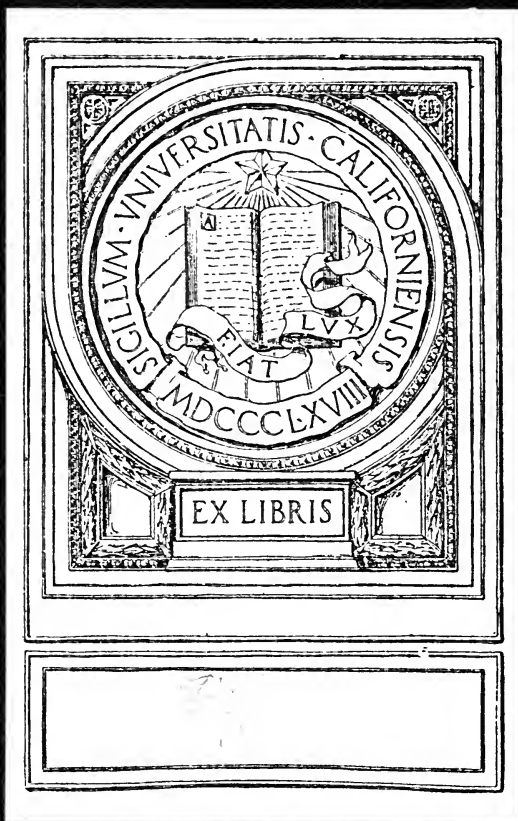
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JOHN OF PROCIDA;
OR,
THE BRIDALS OF MESSINA.
BY
JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES.

PRICE FOUR SHILLINGS.

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JOHN OF PROCIDA;

OR,

THE
BRIDALS OF
MESSINA

THE BRIDALS OF MESSINA.

A Tragedy.

IN FIVE ACTS.

BY

JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES.

AUTHOR OF "VIRINIUS," "THE HUNCHBACK," ETC.

LONDON:
EDWARD MOXON, DOVER STREET.

MDCCCXL.

TO THE
MEMBERS OF THE
SOCIETY OF
PRINTERS

LONDON :
BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

TO

CAPTAIN CHARLES H. TOWNLEY, R.N.

4, GREAT GEORGE'S SQUARE, LIVERPOOL.

My Dear Friend,

I have the greatest pride and pleasure in now redeeming an old promise—that of dedicating a **PLAY** of mine to you.

Whether as a gallant naval officer, an accomplished seaman, or an amiable private citizen, I do not know the man who ought to supersede you in receiving this humble heart-tribute from your affectionate and grateful servant,

JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES.

29, ALFRED PLACE, BEDFORD SQUARE.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IN the sweet solitudes of Loch Ard, while domesticated under the roof of my friend Mr. Robert Dick, this tragedy, like my last drama, "Love," was rapidly composed. My kind host, upon this occasion, as well as upon the former one, controlled my passion for the angle as much as he could, proportioning my indulgence in my favourite amusement to my industry and progress, which he daily watched with tyrannical scrutiny. It was needed. To him and to his amiable family I owe some of the happiest and most profitable weeks I ever spent.

The manner in which this play has been got up reflects the highest credit on Mr. and Mrs. Mathews. No expense has been shrunk from. The scenery, dresses, everything, have been supplied with lavish liberality. Zealously and ably have Mr. Bartley and Mr. Cooper superintended the rehearsals of the play.

The Messrs. Grieve have laboured hard, and not in vain, to divide with the author the credit of success—and I thank them most cordially.

I am sure the performers will carry the tragedy through triumphantly, as far as triumph depends on their talents and exertions. To one of them I feel bound to allude in particular, inasmuch as he is comparatively a stranger on the London boards—I mean Mr. Moore. To this gentleman I have entrusted the hero of my play; my confidence in his abilities is perfect, and will, I am satisfied, be thoroughly borne out by the result.

CHARACTERS.

SICILIANS.

PROCIDA	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Moore.</i>
FERNANDO	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Anderson.</i>
GUISCARDO	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Cooper.</i>
MARTINI	. . . . .	<i>Mr. W. H. Payne.</i>
ANDREA	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Hemming.</i>
CARLO	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Binge.</i>
STEPHANO	. . . . .	<i>Mr. C. J. Smith.</i>
THOMASO	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Collett.</i>
FRANCISCO	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Morelli.</i>

FRENCH.

GOVERNOR	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Diddear.</i>
MARTEL	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Brindal.</i>
LOUIS	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Fitzjames.</i>
AMBROSE	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Bland.</i>
LE CLERC	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Wigan.</i>
FRANCOIS	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Honner.</i>
PIERRE	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Connell.</i>
ANTHONIO	. . . . .	<i>Mr. S. Smith.</i>
EUGENE	. . . . .	<i>Mr. Thompson.</i>
ISOLINE	. . . . .	<i>Miss E. Tree.</i>
MARGUERITE	. . . . .	<i>Miss Fitzjames.</i>

JOHN OF PROCIDA;

OR,

THE BRIDALS OF MESSINA.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A Pass in the Mountains near Messina.

Enter GUISCARDO and STEPHANO.

GUISCARDO.

HIS words were fire—both light and heat! At once
With zeal they warm'd us, and convinced with reason.
I had read and heard of eloquence before,
How 'tis despotic; takes the heart by storm,
Whate'er the ramparts, prejudice, or use
Environ it withal; how, 'fore its march,
Stony resolves have given way like flax;
How it can raise, or lay, the mighty surge
Of popular commotion, as the wind,
The wave that frets the sea;—but, till to-day,
I never proved its power. When he began,
A thousand hearers prick'd their ears to list,
With each a different heart; when he left off,
Each man could tell his neighbour's, by his own.

STEPHANO.

Is't John of Procida?

GUISCARDO.

So rumour says.

Who else? The constant'st friend of Sicily;
 The friend that loves, yet suffers for his love.
 Heard'st ever lips before, with power like his?
 A holy man, and brigand, near me stood,
 Wedged by the press together; churlishly
 They first endured their compell'd neighbourhood,
 And shrank from contact, they would fain escape;
 The one with terror; and with scorn the other,
 Who blaz'd with life and passion, like a torch
 Beside a taper;—such the man of prayer
 Appear'd, in contrast with the freebooter.
 But, lo! the change! soon as the orator
 That universal chord, with master skill,
 Essay'd—the love of country—like two springs,
 Ravines apart, whose waters blend at last
 In some sweet valley; leaning cheek to cheek,
 Attracted by resistless sympathy,
 Their tears together ran, one goodly river!
 Hark! the dispersing crowd, taking their leave
 From the last hill-tops. Let us join them. [*They cheer.*]

STEPHANO.

Hither

Come Andrea and John of Procida.

Let's on, my friend, nor interrupt their converse,
 For it seems deep, and earnest.

GUISCARDO.

Have with you.

I would Fernando had been here, that friend
I scarce can boast, yet can't refrain to love.
If there be latent virtue in his blood,
O' the kind endears the land that gives us birth,
Such heart enforcement sure had call'd it forth !

[*They go out.*

Enter PROCIDA, disguised as a Cordelier, and ANDREA.

ANDREA.

You move my wonder past the speaking on't.
I never dream'd in such extremity,
Such hope could be so near !

PROCIDA.

'Tis in the crisis
The fever does or dies. Our friends abroad
Are warm and not a few ; the fleet you see
In the offing, and supposed the Pope's, is ours ;
At home, Sicilians are as one single man,
Their thoughts, their feelings, their resolves, the same.
In this disguise, each quarter of the isle
Where man hath habitation, house, or cave,
I have visited ; and tuned the minds of all
To the same temper and the self-same aim,
Vengeance and Liberty ! Before a week
The hordes of France shall dwindle to the man
Whose execution ends them.

ANDREA.

Retribution
Indeed !

PROCIDA.

Yes ; sweeping and definitive.
Thou seem'st to lower at it. Hast any part

In France? Dost owe her kindliness or ruth?
The tyranny that Sicily weeps daily
With blood?—her children's scourge, as testify
Murder and rapine, that unblushingly
Enact their parts in open day, and lust
With quite as little shame? I know that men
Will turn to tigers in a stormed town
That's yielded them to sack; but Syracuse,
Palermo, and Messina, stood no siege,
And yet they sack'd them, and the game goes on,
And in cold blood. What weighs upon thy heart?
Or what can weigh when thy dear native land
Is nigh to throw her grievous burden off?

ANDREA.

'Twas not with heed for France my visage fell,
But thee.

PROCIDA.

But me! For what?

ANDREA.

Those who devote themselves
To virtuous causes, where bad men prevail
And breed contamination, have at times
A hard and most ungracious part to play,
When those they love behoves they mark to suffer.

PROCIDA.

Whom do I mark to suffer, yet do love?
I have no kindred, have I? If I have,
It must be only in that far degree
Where distance genders strangeness.

ANDREA.

Hadst thou not
A son?

PROCIDA.

Thou know'st I had ! Thou know'st he's dead !
The infant perish'd in the sacking of
My castle !—So it was affirmed by one
Who brought the horrid tale—Is he alive ?

ANDREA.

Be patient ! You remember, do you not,
When he was four years old, or thereabouts—
You told me his age, for he was then a boy
Might pass for six, and I did take him for it,
He was so fine a child—you recollect
At e'en that tender age a hard excrescence,
And something like a wart, but larger, which
Like threatening mischief had begun to grow,
At thy request I from his fore-arm cut.
'Twas rooted deep ; as deep of course the wound,
And, answering to the knife, of crucial form !

PROCIDA.

I recollect it ! Is the boy alive ?

ANDREA.

Listen ! 'Twas here I cut it from his arm.
'Tis true another might have such a cause
For surgery in even such a place,
And such a scar the remedy might leave ;
Though to my own hand I could safely swear.

PROCIDA.

Hast seen the mark on any one ?

ANDREA.

I pray you
Hear what I have to tell, then draw yourself
The inference.

PROCIDA.

O Heaven ! I have a son,
And he's in jeopardy, and I the cause !

ANDREA.

Remember you one Angelo Martini ?

PROCIDA.

Master of arms ?

ANDREA.

The same ; I went to see
The practice at his school. One—a young man
Of most commanding person, and of 'haviour
To win all hearts—took up the foil to play,
And baring his right arm for freer use—

PROCIDA.

You saw the mark ! You saw the scar !

ANDREA.

I did.

The very cicatrix my knife had left.

PROCIDA.

I have not heard news of late—and such as this
Comes somewhat suddenly. Is he a man
Of honour ?

ANDREA.

I would think him so.

PROCIDA.

Would think ?

Nay, then, I see what he is !

ANDREA.

Indeed, my friend,

I cannot say he is, nor yet, is not.

PROCIDA.

You say he stands in danger, and from me.
'Tis clear as day—I comprehend it all !
He takes the part of France ! His heart is French !
What Sicily gave him he gives to France,
The curse of Sicily ! And if a sword
Lights on his head for that, who'll blame the smiter ?
Not his own father !—Where abideth he ?

ANDREA.

In Messina, with the governor.

PROCIDA.

Perdition !
Scarce is the worst told ere worse follows it !
The governor !

ANDREA.

Nay, John of Procida,
Command thyself !

PROCIDA.

Could'st thou, if thou wast I ?
Did'st question him about that scar ? Perhaps
'Tis not my son ! O Heaven ! in what a strait
A father may be put. I wish'd him dead
Just now. I own I did. Did'st speak to him
About that mark ?

ANDREA.

No—there were standers by.

PROCIDA.

You follow'd him out ?

ANDREA.

No.

PROCIDA.

No !

ANDREA.

One beckon'd me
Apart, and held mine ear; and when I turn'd
To look for him, I miss'd him. He had gone!

PROCIDA.

You have seen him since, and spoken with him!

ANDREA.

No:

I have craved an audience, but was out of time.

PROCIDA.

Indeed! A mighty man! You should have thrust
All let aside, and walk'd into his chamber,
And told him who you were—and what he was!

ANDREA.

You do forget I was a stranger to him.

PROCIDA.

You did forget you were his father's friend,
And by that title had a right to see him
At any place, at any hour o' the day.
Whom does he pass for?

ANDREA.

Not thy son.

PROCIDA.

That's right!
I am very glad of that!

ANDREA.

All I could learn
Was this;—that in the sacking of thy castle
He only did escape, a little child.
The governor adopted him, and gave him
The liberal training of a cavalier.
Favour on kindness grew, and love on favour,

And e'en to-day the governor bestows
His only daughter on him.

PROCIDA.

Pestilence
Spring from their union if they wed !

ANDREA.

My friend !

PROCIDA.

When is the ceremony ?

ANDREA.

I have said

To-day.

PROCIDA.

The hour—I mean the very hour.

ANDREA.

At twelve.

PROCIDA.

Let the world end ere it takes place !

It must be stopp'd.

ANDREA.

And who shall stop it ?

PROCIDA.

I !

Straight to Messina. Come ! The shortest way !

[*They go out.*]

SCENE II.

A Street in Messina.

Enter STEPHANO, THOMASO, CARLO.

CARLO.

No mischief come last night to any friends
Of yours ?

STEPHANO.

None, sir, that I have heard.

CARLO.

No throat

In frolic cut? No gamesome robbery?

No courtesy on wife or daughter forced

Of any that you know?

STEPHANO.

None.

CARLO.

Luckless man!

My brother was compell'd keep open shop

After the hour of shutting—customers

So hot, there's not a shelf he hath but gapes

For new replenishing! And that took place

Not half a month before. No pleasant news

With you?

[To THOMASO.]

THOMASO.

None yet!

CARLO.

Take comfort, it will come

Before we get to the end of the next street.

The French do love us, sirs; and, like true friends,

Will keep our spirits from stagnation, though

It be against our wills. You know 'tis health.

Come on. We'll have more news, and plenty on't. [Going.]

GUISCARDO (*without, at the opposite side*).

Thomaso! Stephano! Stop! Turn! (*Enters.*) At last

You hear me, sirs! I am breathed with chasing you!

Why were you not at home?

THOMASO.

Why, what's the matter?

GUISCARDO.

Blood, sirs !

CARLO.

There's news !

GUISCARDO.

News ! 'Tis the common cry
Of every day !

THOMASO.

Yes ; but the common'st thing
That affects others, hath a stranger's face
When it comes home to us. Whose blood, Guiscardo ?
Take breath and tell us.

GUISCARDO.

Are you not akin
To Angelo Martini ?

THOMASO *and* STEPHANO.

What of him ?

GUISCARDO.

His house did suffer shame last night ! his daughter !
His only child !—That force should dare assail
A temple of such holy chastity !
The spoiler of her honour and her life—
For with her virgin jewel did he take
The witness of the theft—a mangled corse,
Cast into the street by Angelo, who came
Too late to save, but timely for revenge,
Lies 'fore the father's gate, which hounds beset,
More monstrous for the human forms they wear,
Howling to lap the blood of Angelo ;
And casting looks of savage purposes
On the few friends, that, holding yet aloof,
With augmentation might defy their fangs.
Have you your weapons ?

STEPHANO.

Yes. Who goes without
That walks through streets of licensed murderers?

GUISCARDO.

Grasp them then ! Hie ye straight to Angelo,
While I unto the castle speed to move
A friend's good offices to stop the fray,
The favourite of the governor—Fernando.
And be ye resolute, comes it to more blood !
Death's nothing to the fear ! There lies the pang,
And that we suffer every hour in the day.
[*They go out severally.*]

SCENE III.

A Chamber in the Castle.

Enter MARTEL and LOUIS.

MARTEL.

What uproar keeps this din without the castle ?

LOUIS.

I know not, but the town is all astir ;
Hither and thither fly the citizens.
What can it mean ?

MARTEL.

Here's one will give the cause. [Enter AMBROSE.
Well, Ambrose ?

AMBROSE.

Count de Marlez has been murdered,
And cast into the street ! his body hack'd
From head to foot.

MARTEL.

Who did it ?

AMBROSE.

Angelo

Martini.

MARTEL.

Was it in a quarrel, or

Did he assassinate him ?

AMBROSE.

I know not.

This moment come I from before the house
Of Angelo Martini, which the friends
Of the slain Count beset, while close at hand
Those of Martini wait, as if prepared
To take part with the murderer ; who, the while,
From open casement in the upper floor,
With savage looks, holds forth a gory arm,
Grasping a blade of the same ghastly hue,
And, waving't o'er the body of his child,
Blanch'd milk-white of her blood, and half exposed,
Declares he'll ne'er surrender, save a corse
Mangled like his below.

MARTEL.

Some love affair !

Conquerors do not brook coy mistresses !

LOUIS.

This falls out ominously, does it not,

Upon the nuptial day ?

MARTEL.

The nuptial hour !

Strange nuptials, sir ! It oft has moved my wonder
The Governor, a stern and gloomy man,

Should so affect the young Sicilian.
Is't love? I have mark'd him oft, with looks that spoke
Aught but content, gazing upon Fernando
Minutes together; then, with deepest sigh,
Break off the scrutiny—for such it seem'd—
And turn to moody pondering. His daughter
Were better wed, methinks, to one of France
Than to a son of Sicily, of blood
Unknown, and all unfriended like her bridegroom.

LE CLERC (*without*).

Prevent him! Stop him!

GUISCARDO (*without*).

Nay,
I will pass in!

MARTEL.

Suffer him, good Le Clerc;
I know him. He's Fernando's friend, and comes
Doubtless to speak with him.

LOUIS.

How wild he looks!

AMBROSE.

And spectre-like.

GUISCARDO (*rushing in, followed by LE CLERC*).

Fernando! Sirs! Fernando!

MARTEL.

Why, what's amiss?

GUISCARDO.

Don't question me, dear sirs;
Fernando!

MARTEL.

Here he is.

[*Enter FERNANDO.*]

GUISCARDO (*catching FERNANDO by the arm*).

Come forth with me !

Come !—Angelo Martini !—

FERNANDO (*resisting*).

Stop.

GUISCARDO.

Nay, come !

Come !

FERNANDO.

What's the matter ?

GUISCARDO.

Read it in my looks,

And save the time of telling on't !—or come

And I will tell you as we go along !

Come !

FERNANDO.

Hold ! you'll tear my sleeve. Do you not know

It is my wedding day ?

GUISCARDO.

Do you not know

A man call'd Angelo Martini, and

Seest not he is in danger ?

FERNANDO.

I infer so.

GUISCARDO.

Thou dost ? and art not now upon the way

To his house ? Thy tutor ! Angelo Martini !

'Sdeath, art thou flesh or stone ? Offer'st thou not

To move !

FERNANDO.

You'll find it husbandry of time

To spend what's needed ; else, you save to waste.

What of Martini ?

GUISCARDO.

Ay !—So !—Is't the way ?
Ought friends to take it leisurely in straits
Where hottest speed is slow to those they love
Lying in jeopardy ? Sit down, sir. Well. [*Seats himself.*]
We sit as stand—we progress either way
As fast. Sit down and listen. Yesternight—
Pray you your chair—I cannot well go on
Until I see you at your ease. (FERNANDO *sits.*)—Last night,
As I said, a thief—not such as filches coin—
Was the unbidden guest of Angelo ;
Chamber'd with his fair child, without her leave,
As her gored breast can vouch for you ; Angelo—
I trust my tongue does not outstep your ear ?

FERNANDO.

Go on !

GUISCARDO.

In good time, sir. Well ! Angelo,
Waked by a shriek—'twas not without the house,
But came from the quarter where his daughter couch'd—
And—taking the strange summons with more heat
Of apprehension, than will suffer one
That hath the use of limb to lie abed,
Or sit his chair as we do—to afford
The aid was needed, rush'd where he might give it,
And at the door encounter'd him who'd made him
A host without his privity or wish,
Dagger in hand, sir, slinking from the bier
Had been, an hour before, the virgin's bed !

FERNANDO.

What follow'd ?

GUISCARDO.

One might guess, a blow!—Yes, sir—
While the blood runs 'twill heat or cool upon
Occasion. Yes, sir; Angelo, our friend,
A generous man, although we say it, like
To exact penalty for injury
Done to a common friend (and how much more
An only child!) struck—nor with naked hand,
Nor easily contented! Blow begot
Blow, till the body of the Count—

FERNANDO.

What Count?

GUISCARDO.

The Count de Marlez.

FERNANDO.

Was he stabb'd by Angelo?

GUISCARDO.

—And stabb'd till not a palm's breadth of his body
But bears the crimson seal that witnesses
The glut of ravening vengeance! as it lies
In the street cast forth the casement, of whose sill
Angelo makes a bier to show his child
To the amaze-benumbed lookers-on.
While the retainers, countrymen, and friends
Of the Count assault the gate of Angelo
To get at him and tear him limb from limb.
The which thy timely presence had prevented.
But not enough thou know'st thy friend doth need thee.
Behoves his need be woven a history,
And while the loom's a-going I must ply,
They massacre the man who taught and loved thee!

FERNANDO.

Go forth, my friends, and succour Angelo.
Take others with you—all the aid you can.
Dissuade his enemies from violence.
Use the Duke's name. Command them to forbear,
And leave rebuke to him.

[MARTEL and others rush out.]

GUISCARDO.

Go'st thou not too ?
Play'st thou the friend by heartless deputy,
To foil the foes that work with all their hearts ?
Keep'st thou the castle when Martini's house
Is made the stall of savage butchery ?
Lend'st him a finger when he wants thy hand,
Thy limbs, and body ?

FERNANDO.

'Tis my wedding-day ;
The very hour I lead my bride to church.

GUISCARDO.

Thou wast his son to Angelo Martini,
And when thy presence would be life to him,
And it is ask'd of thee, thou givest it not,
But send'st him that of men who'd look with coldness,
If not with joy, upon Martini's carcass !
Because thy nuptials may not be delay'd !
Ached thy bride's head, would it not stop them ?—or
Would they go on, fell the Duke sudden sick ?
Or chanced to shake Messina with a fit
Of the earthquake ? or the cataracts of Etna
Began to play ?—But not a pause, although
'Thou heard'st the life blood gurgling in the throat

Of Angelo Martini ! Fare thee well—
If well ingratitude did ever fare.
Mingle thy blood with those, at thought of whom,
Wast thou the tithe of a Sicilian,
Thy blood would curdle. We were brothers once ;
One mind—one soul ! We now are two—apart !
Disjoin'd ! Opposed ! Never to meet again
Except to the woe of the one or other of us ! [Goes out.

FERNANDO.

Come back ! Fool ! Meddler ! Braggart !

ISOLINE (*entering*).

How is this ?

What dost thou with thy weapon in thy hand ?

Ha ! by thy looks, it was not without need

Thou drewest it ! Sweet Heaven ! I saw thee thus

Last night !

FERNANDO.

Where, dearest ?

ISOLINE.

In my dreams, Fernando ;

That brought me naught but fearful images !

Tumults where daggers gleam'd and blood did run

Along the kennels of the streets, instead

Of its own channels. There, my friend, were you

And I in the midst, your one arm circling me,

Your other my defence 'gainst horrid men

That stood around, a stride or two aloof,

Like hounds, awhile at bay, prepared to spring !

Ah ! then had I a taste of death—great Heavens !

The sickness on't ! Yet e'en that sickness still

Sweetness, methought, to die along with thee.

They struck—you fell ! I waked while yet the room
Rang with a shriek. Put up thy sword, lest now
A prodigy should harrow up my soul,
And drops of gore, uncall'd, start on its blade !
Is't up ?

FERNANDO.

It is.

ISOLINE.

'Tis very strange, Fernando ;
This is our wedding-day, and yet I feel
As though we should not marry.

FERNANDO.

Wouldst thou then
Our nuptials should be marr'd ?

ISOLINE.

No !—Would you think
'Twas the coy maid of but a week ago
That answered you so promptly ? 'Twas not quickly
I learned to love you—though, to do you justice,
No master ever labour'd more to teach.
But now, methinks, I have the lesson better
By heart than you have.

FERNANDO.

Better !

ISOLINE.

Yes, Fernando !
And so you'd find, were you to slight the pupil
You took such pains with once. I would not have
Our nuptials marr'd—and, more, they shan't be so
Have I the power to help it.

FERNANDO.

Isoline,
Thy father !—

ISOLINE.

Well ?—Say on ;
I'd hear thee say't though all the world were by.

FERNANDO.

I bless thee for thy bounteous love !

Enter GOVERNOR.

GOVERNOR.

Come, child,
And on my other hand, Fernando come.
The bridal company, in readiness
To attend you to the altar, wait for you.

*[As they are going, MARTEL and
LOUIS enter hastily.]*

What would you, friends ?

MARTEL.

A word, sir, with Fernando.

GOVERNOR.

Be brief, then, as you may. *[Leading ISOLINE off.]*

ISOLINE *(stopping and turning)*.

Fernando !

FERNANDO.

Love,
A moment and I'm with you !

GOVERNOR.

Isoline !

ISOLINE.

I come !—the ground appears to hold my steps.

[She goes out with the GOVERNOR.]

FERNANDO.

Well, friends ; were you in time ?

MARTEL.

To see the house
Of Angelo Martini in a blaze ;
Lit by his own hand, the funereal pyre
Of his slain child. Whence, soon as 'twas in flames,
Taking advantage of the pause in which
Amaze enchain'd his foes, with clotted blade
Did Angelo burst forth, a spectacle
Of blood-congealing horror, that awhile
Deprived of use the members which unless
For such a frost had dealt him fifty deaths.
But soon it turn'd to thaw, yet not until
Martini's friends surrounded him ; and now
Along the streets a running fight they keep,
Leaving an ample, ghastly track, with blood,
And here and there a body drain'd of it.

FERNANDO.

For mercy's sake provide you with a guard
And use all pains to stop this hideous fray,
And above all to save Martini's life !
Fly friends ! O spare not speed ! Do all you can
This swift untimely mischief to o'ertake !

[MARTEL and LOUIS go out ; FERNANDO following.]

SCENE IV.

The outside of a Church. Enter VIRGINS strewing Flowers after the Bridal Party.

CHORUS OF VIRGINS.

As now the track with flowers we strew
Your path of life with joys be fair !
Though wither these, no fading there ;
Nor thorny care your footsteps rue.

(At the end of the Singing, Tumult is heard without at a distance.)

GOVERNOR.

What din is this that seems approaching us ?

LE CLERC.

[Entering hastily.]

My lord, take shelter in the church ! There's death
In the streets.

GOVERNOR.

What ! Of Messina, sir ; and I
Its governor ? Am I to slink away
In fear ? Swords, gentlemen ! What man is he
Comes first ? who flies, yet halts,—whom they in chase of
Do strive, yet seem to fear, to overtake,
Turning pursuit to flight whene'er he stops
And shows them front ?

LE CLERC.

'Tis Angelo Martini.

GOVERNOR.

What savage deed hath made a brute of him
That men become a pack, and hunt him thus ?

LE CLERC.

He has kill'd the Count de Marlez.

FERNANDO.

Life for life !

The Count did kill his daughter. Little wrong,
To wrong most grievous that preceded it.

GOVERNOR.

You are sure of this ?

FERNANDO.

I am.

GOVERNOR.

Succour him, sirs.

FERNANDO.

Too late !

MARTINI (*without*).

Take that !

[*Enters staggering, followed by GUISCARDO and others
with swords drawn.*]

—full payment, slave, and prompt !

As you are christian men, don't suffer them

Hack me to death. I am wounded mortally ! (*Falls.*)

FERNANDO.

How is it, Angelo Martini ?

MARTINI.

Thus,

Fernando, thus ! My daughter !—Where were you ?

But I forgive you ! (*Dies.*)

FERNANDO.

O, look up, old man !

GUISCARDO.

He sleeps too sound, Fernando, to awake !

My lord, the Governor, protection for

The friends of Angelo Martini, who,

With naked weapons, had not stood in the streets

But to protect him from foul butchery.
His house did suffer violence last night,
And murder in the person of his child,
Now burn'd to ashes with her natal roof,
Which Angelo himself in frenzy fired.
He caught and slew the caitiff, for which act,
By nature warranted, if not by law,
Began this game of death, which we would spoil,
But thus the just yet weaker side hath lost.

GOVERNOR.

Though great his crime first slain, the blood so shed
Was French! Moreover, it was noble! Look
Yourselves to your lives—I will not answer for them
Beyond Messina. Hence, and sheathe your blades.
Marks are upon them that offend our eyes,
And breed you danger.

GUISCARDO.

Are we safe the while?

GOVERNOR.

You are, but quit Messina. Guard them to
The outskirts of the town.

GUISCARDO.

Fernando, speak.

Look there. Your bridal flowers have gone, you see,
To deck a bloody bier. So fare thy joys!

[Goes out with others guarded.]

GOVERNOR.

Remove the body. In our way it lies.

ISOLINE.

Nay, father; sooner let us go about!

GOVERNOR.

Come on, then.

PROCIDA (*coming from the back of the stage*).

Stop. The rites must not proceed.

GOVERNOR.

They have not yet begun !

PROCIDA.

Nor must begin.

GOVERNOR.

Who shall prevent them ?

PROCIDA.

Heaven. In the name of which
I charge you to desist.

GOVERNOR.

Your reasons ?

PROCIDA.

Those

The bridegroom shall be told ; for him
They most regard.

FERNANDO.

Impart them, then !

PROCIDA.

Not here.

GOVERNOR.

You juggle with us !

PROCIDA.

No ; the part I act
Is honest.

GOVERNOR.

You are a religious man ?

PROCIDA.

A man devoted to a holy cause.

Young man, let go that hand and come with me.

ISOLINE.

Is this the dark fulfilling of my dream?
Respect you, my Fernando, what he says?

FERNANDO.

His tone, his words, his looks, his gestures, all
Declare authority.

ISOLINE.

O, do not go!

PROCIDA.

He must, would he escape my curse, which here
On him, and all who hold alliance with him,
I shall invoke, resisting my commands.

GOVERNOR.

You dare not do it!

PROCIDA.

Dare not!—listen then—

ISOLINE.

Peace!—drop my hand and go.

PROCIDA.

She bids thee go.
Come.

ISOLINE.

Go, Fernando!

PROCIDA.

Mark, again she bids thee.

Why shouldst thou hesitate? The cause is thine,
And thou thyself art constituted judge.
I hope thou 'rt a brave man, and not afraid
To trust thyself with me. If idly, or
On slight pretence I interpose, thou knowest
Thou canst come back, and then the rites go on.
So mayst thou gain thy bride, and 'scape my curse.

ISOLINE.

Shall he come back in any case?

PROCIDA.

He shall.

ISOLINE.

Go! go! Fernando.

PROCIDA.

That is the third time

She bade thee go.

FERNANDO.

I follow!

PROCIDA.

Come along.

[PROCIDA and FERNANDO go out.

ISOLINE faints in her father's
arms, as the latter disappears.

END OF ACT FIRST.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

A Mountain Pass. Etna in the distance.

Enter PROCIDA and FERNANDO.

PROCIDA.

Look up. What seest thou?

FERNANDO.

Etna.

PROCIDA.

Where stands Etna?

FERNANDO.

In Sicily.

PROCIDA.

Then this is Sicily,

Where Etna stands, and thou look'st up to it.

And yet, methinks, thou knowest not thou stand'st

In Sicily.

FERNANDO.

I know it as well as thou.

PROCIDA.

Deny it, then! Tell him who says thou stand'st there

He is mistaken! Rather say thou stand'st

In any other isle that spots the sea;

And give thy oath to it, though Etna there,

Before thee, should break silence at the lie,

And bellow forth—" 'Tis Sicily thou stand'st in! "

FERNANDO.

Beware! young blood is hot.

PROCIDA.

Behoves it, then,
Beware it runs no peril from its heat.
Young blood is generous, too!—not always!—then
Its heat is virtue bringing virtue forth,
As sun the healthful plant in stronger flower.
Its heat is as the thing it acts upon,
As summer in the garden genders fruit,
But in the swamp breeds poison. Know me, sir,
So far. I wear a sword! (*throws off his gown*) Now, of thy
Why should I stand in fear? [heat,

FERNANDO.

Lest thou offend
Mine honour!

PROCIDA.

Show it me, I'll not offend it;
Else I offend mine own. If I gainsay
The square, the plummet, or the level, what
Shall I gain credence for? I am a fool
Or knave. I either know not; or deny,
Yet know. But honour is the name as well
As thing, and with the thing not always goes,
But serves a spurious owner, as the stamp
Of gold at times is given to base coin.
The gambler that will load a die, will cut
Your throat, so you dare tell him on't—for honour!
The libertine who uses, for your shame,
Your hospitable trust—a felon, worse
Than he who filches purses with his sword—
Demands your blood, if you impugn his honour!
Whence, with a coward world, the bully lust

Hath gracious entertainment at the hands
Which hold the custody of maidens' snow,
And never question'd matrons. What do you say
To the honour of a traitor—false at once
To his liege lord and country? taking part
With their arch, pitiless, contentless foes?
Shall such a man have honour? Ay, shall he so,
Hath he the bloodhound's quality to vouch
The barefaced lie a truth!

FERNANDO.

Thou lovest danger!

PROCIDA.

No, I love virtue, sir, and fear not danger.
Art thou Sicilian?

FERNANDO.

Yes.

PROCIDA.

Sicilian born?

FERNANDO.

Yes.

PROCIDA.

In the mountain island first drew breath?

FERNANDO.

Yes.

PROCIDA.

Art thou sure? Where saw'st thou first the sun,
To know him as thou recollectest?

FERNANDO.

In

Messina.

PROCIDA.

Knowest thou the history
Of this thy native land? Who was her king
When first thou madest acquaintance with the sun,

The blessed sun God gave thee leave to see
When he vouchsafed thee draw the breath of life
In Sicily ?

FERNANDO.

Why Manfred then was king.

PROCIDA.

What came of him ?

FERNANDO.

He lost his crown.

PROCIDA.

'Tis false !

FERNANDO (*aside*).

What power hath this mysterious man
That while he chafes me thus, I thus forbear !

PROCIDA.

Were one to take thy purse from thee by force,
Wouldst say that thou hadst lost it ? Thou wouldst say
That thou wast robb'd of it. So Manfred was
Robb'd of his crown. Lost it ! Who say you now
Is king of Sicily ?

FERNANDO.

Charles of Anjou.

PROCIDA.

That's false

Again ! Charles of Anjou is usurper
And not a king—not king of Sicily.
Manfred was slain in battle, was he not ?

FERNANDO.

He was.

PROCIDA.

He was. He died as became a king
Defending his own crown against the robber
Who wrench'd it from his brow. You answer well.

You know your country's history. What next?
Who follow'd in the strife? Who struggled next
With the arch felon? held his throat to him—
For it was nothing else, with powers so broken—
Ere he would tamely be a looker-on,
And see him wear the spoil?

FERNANDO.

Conradine.

PROCIDA.

Yes!

The chivalrous, the patriotic prince!
He took the cause up—but he lost the day.

FERNANDO.

And with the day his life.

PROCIDA.

How? Can't you tell?
Know you so far the tragedy so well,
And do you halt at the catastrophe
Which brings the crowning horror of the whole?
The Prince was taken captive—taken alive—
Whole! without scaith! No wound, the matter even
Of a pin's scratch! Now mark the freebooter
In Charles of Anjou—him thou namedst now
The King of Sicily. Mark now how blood
And plunder go together like sworn friends
Conradine was a captive. What had he done?
What Charles himself had done in such a case,
And had a right so to have done, were he
A saint and not a robber. Fought for the crown
Of his forefathers! What could Conradine
That Charles need fear? He was bound hand and foot:

He was as one that's bedridden ! that's struck
With a palsy ! Charles had just as much to fear
From Conradine as from an infant in the cradle.
What did he to him ?—He beheaded him !

FERNANDO.

'Twas sacrilege !

PROCIDA.

"'Twas murder !—murder, sir !
Murder and sacrilege !—Conradine met the scaffold
In his own kingdom, like a host that's butcher'd
In his own house, by thieves ! Now mark, young man,
How bruised, broken, lost in fortunes, still
The noble spirit to the last bears up
And towers above its fate. Beside the block,
Within the axe's glare, yet would not he
Give up his righteous cause, but from his hand
His gauntlet drew and flung into the space
'Twixt him and those who came to see him die.
"For Jesu' sake," he cried, "who loves me there
Pick up my gage, and with it take the charge
A dying man gives with his parting breath,
That he present it to that kinsman of
My house who takes its rightful quarrel up,
And whom with all my rights I here invest !"—
I see the story somewhat touches thee.

FERNANDO.

I never heard it told so well before.
Wast thou a stander by ?

PROCIDA.

I was. What then ?

FERNANDO.

Didst thou pick up the gage ?

PROCIDA.

Wouldst thou have done it ?

FERNANDO.

I would.

PROCIDA.

And wherefore ?

FERNANDO.

Out of pity for
That murder'd king.

PROCIDA.

What!—Given thy private cares,
Hopes, havings, up, to consecrate thy life
To his most desperate cause—his throne usurp'd !
His land o'errun ! his people scatter'd, that
Together not so many hang as one
Might call a broken troop !—So seeming-lost
A cause as that, at cost so dear hadst thou
Embraced, and ta'en the gauntlet up ?

FERNANDO.

I had !

PROCIDA (*taking a glove from his breast*).

There 'tis ! There !—as I pluck'd it from the scaffold foot !
The look that martyr cast upon me then,
It shed more healing unction on my soul,
Than fifty thousand masses at my death
Could do, each chanted by as many lips,
And all of holy men. Now mark how Right,
Although, at setting out, a dwarf in thews,
By holding on will gather sinew, till
It moves that giant Might. With seconding,
Levies, munitions, allies, subsidies—
None other than this empty glove, I went
From Sicily ; where now I stand again,

With monarchs and their kingdoms at my back,
The sworn abettors of the righteous hand
Which, fleshless, tendonless, reduced to bone,
Its holy cause with life thus clothes again,
And arms with retribution. That same hand
Once fill'd this glove, which now I hold to thee.
Take it.

FERNANDO.

For what ?

PROCIDA.

To swear by it.

FERNANDO.

The oath ?

PROCIDA.

Death to the Gaul whoe'er he be, that now
Has footing in the land !—Death without pause
Of ruth—eye, ear, be stone to voice or look
Of deprecation ! Once your blade is out,
While there's a tyrant's heart to lend a sheath,
Never to let it know its own !

FERNANDO.

That oath
I will not take.

PROCIDA.

Thou wilt not ? Thou'rt a traitor !

FERNANDO.

Ha !

PROCIDA.

Thou'rt a coward !

FERNANDO (*drawing*).

Try if I fear death !

PROCIDA.

Death is a little thing to brave or fear.

Except a thought of the after reckoning,
The which to fear becomes, not shames a man :
'Tis but a plunge and over, ta'en as oft
By the feeble as the stout. Give me the man
That's bold in the right—too bold to do the wrong.
Not bold as that, thou art a traitor still
And coward !

FERNANDO.

Draw !

PROCIDA.

For what ? To pleasure thee ?
To place myself on base equality
With one whom I look down upon ?

FERNANDO.

Or draw,
Or I will spurn thee.

PROCIDA.

Villain, to thy knee !

FERNANDO.

My knee !

PROCIDA.

What ! fear'st thou degradation ? How
Can he crouch lower than he does who kneels
To his own weaknesses, when Duty bids him
Stand up and take the manly post becomes him
At the side of Virtue. Were thy mother—she
That bore thee in her womb—in fetters, how
Wouldst deal with those that put them on ? Wouldst talk
And laugh with them—shake hands with them—embrace
them ?

“ Thou wouldst not ! ” But I tell thee, slave, thou wouldst.
For what's thy country, be she not thy mother,
And like a mother loved by thee ? Thou slave,

That seekest kindred with thy country's foes !
Hast thou a father ?

FERNANDO.

Draw !

PROCIDA.

Hast thou a father ?

FERNANDO.

But with my sword's point will I answer thee !

PROCIDA.

Hast thou a father, boy ?

FERNANDO.

Hast thou a hand ?

Behoves that it be quick, and seek thy sword !
Thy life's in danger !

PROCIDA.

Hast thou a father, still

I say to thee ?

FERNANDO.

Thy sword or I'm upon thee !

PROCIDA.

Then wilt thou have a murder on thy soul,
For from my stand I will not budge an inch,
Nor move, so far, my arm to touch my sword,
Until thou answer'st me. Hast thou a father ?

FERNANDO (*bursting into tears*).

No,—no ! thou churlish, harsh, remorseless man—
That bait'st me with thy coarse and biting words,
As boors abroad let loose unmuzzled dogs
Upon a tether'd beast ! my arm withheld
By thy defencelessness, that hast defence
At hand, but will not use it—who art thou
To use me thus ? to do me shameful wrong
And then deny me means to right myself ?

What have I done to thee to use my heart
As if its strings were thine to strain or rend !
Thou mak'st my veins hot with my boiling blood,
And not content, thou followest it up,
Mine eyes inflaming with my scalding tears,
Thou kindless, ruthless man ! Hast thou a father ?
I never knew one !

PROCIDA (*aside*).

I thank God !

FERNANDO.

Thou hadst
A father—hadst a father's training—O
How blest the son that hath. O Providence,
What is there like a father to a son ?
A father, quick in love, wakeful in care,
Tenacious of his trust, proof in experience,
Severe in honour, perfect in example,
Stamp'd with authority ! Hadst such a father ?
I knew no training, save what fostering
Did give me, in the mood ; and was bestow'd
Like bounty to a poor dependant ; which
He might take or leave. Those who protected me
Were masters of my native land, not sons.
How could I learn the patriot's lofty lesson ?
They told me Sicily had given me birth,
But then they taught me also I was son
To a contentless and ungracious mother.
And they were kind to me. What wouldst thou have
Of a young heart, but what you'd ask of wax—
To take the first impression given to it ?
Except that, unlike wax, it is not quick

What once it takes to render up again.

PROCIDA (*aside*).

O, my poor boy !

FERNANDO.

If thou hadst a father,

'Twas cruel, knowing that thou wast so rich,

To taunt me, where, knew'st not that I was poor,

Thou mightst at least suspect my poverty.

How had I loved my father ! He had had

The whole of my heart. I would have given it him

As a book to write in it whate'er he would.

I never had gainsaid him—never run

Counter to him. I had copied him, as one

A statue doth of the rare olden virtue,

In jealous, humble imitation.

I had lived to pleasure him. Before I had

Disgraced him, I had died.

PROCIDA (*aside*).

My son ! My son !

FERNANDO.

Thou weep'st ! O Heaven !

PROCIDA.

Thou wast made captive in

A stormed hold.

FERNANDO.

I was.

PROCIDA.

That hold belong'd

To John of Procida.

FERNANDO.

It did.

PROCIDA.

'Twas storm'd
And taken, in his absence.

FERNANDO.

So 'tis said.

PROCIDA.

That John of Procida had then a son
Just four years old.

FERNANDO.

That age was mine, I have heard,
When first the Governor adopted me.

PROCIDA.

There was no other child within the castle.

FERNANDO.

Was there not ?

PROCIDA.

No !

FERNANDO.

I must have been that child !

PROCIDA.

Upon his right fore-arm he bore a mark.

FERNANDO.

Yes ; here !

PROCIDA.

Yes ; in the very place thou point'st to.

FERNANDO.

I am the son of John of Procida !

PROCIDA.

Thou art ;—and I am John of Procida.

FERNANDO (*falling on his knee*).

Father !

PROCIDA.

My son ! My boy ! My child I left

At four years old and thought was dead !

FERNANDO.

Thou own'st me ?

PROCIDA.

Own thee !—Ay !—Look at me and tell me, boy,
Dost thou not see thy father ?

FERNANDO.

Yes ! Thy looks
Are words of love that call me from thy feet
Up to thy arms.

PROCIDA.

Up to them, then !

FERNANDO (*rising, and throwing himself into the arms
of PROCIDA*).

My father !

PROCIDA.

O, my son !

FERNANDO.

What shall I do ?

PROCIDA.

What mean you ?

FERNANDO.

What shall I do ?

Give me the glove !

PROCIDA.

My son !

FERNANDO.

The gauntlet of
The martyr king !

PROCIDA.

There !—Stop ! Not now, my son ;
I find thee quick in the affection
Thou owest me, and which, like a new spring
Just struck upon, doth bubble richly up
And run an ample torrent. No, my son ;

I will not take advantage of the burst
To let it hurry thee along with it.
A sudden change and violent, is scarce
A lasting one. Thou mightst repent it. No;
I'll prove thee ere thou join'st the holy cause.
Thou to Messina shalt return once more,
Before thou see'st her free. My word was given.
Thou art a man. Men that uphold the name
Act, not from impulse, but reflection.
Declare thy meditated nuptials things
Thy duty to thy neighbour and thy God
Compels thee to abandon. Then come back,
From every let released, and take the oath,
And live the son of John of Procida.

FERNANDO.

When I can say thy first behest is done,
I'll show myself to thee. Farewell!

[*Goes out.*]

PROCIDA.

Farewell!

How suddenly his visage brighten'd up,
At mention of returning to Messina.
What speed is there! Is't all on my account?
Now he is gone my heart misgives me. What
Have I done? Why do we pray that we be spared
Temptation, but that 'tis a whirlpool, which,
Once we're within its vortex, draws us in
And sucks us down to ruin—Charybdis like!
Which of the huge war-galley makes as light,
As boat, compared to that, a cockle-shell!
Whence should all men that love their souls beware

Temptation. I will call him back ! He is out
Of hearing. Should his love for her be strong ?
I did not note if she was very fair.
But souls were never made for eyes to read,
And there lies woman's beauty. If she loves
Strongly—and O how strongly woman loves—
The force of two hearts must he struggle with.
I'll trust in Heaven ! Alas ! how many men
Do trust in Heaven, when they betray themselves !
If he's my son—! I talk with fifty years
For counsellors ! O, it was oversight,
Preposterous in a father ! If I have found
My son to lose him—best I ne'er had found him.
Yet ere I lose him I will risk my life—
Risk all—except the sacred cause I'm sworn to.

[*Goes out.*

END OF ACT SECOND.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

Isoline's Chamber.

Enter GOVERNOR and ISOLINE.

GOVERNOR.

THUS, save the nature of the grievous wrong
Which on my conscience weighs—which to repair
I to Fernando would have wedded thee,
Will wed thee still, comes he to claim thy hand—
Of all have I possess'd thee : who he is ;
The mortal enmity his father bears me ;
The public foe join'd to the private one ;
His hatred of our race, love for his own ;
Devotion to the dynasty, held sway
In Sicily ere France supplanted it ;
Hopes to make head again ; efforts, intrigues
With foreign powers to raise up foes to France.
That he, whose presence stopp'd the rites to-day,
May act in concert with the Procida,
Though past the scope of probability,
Lies within that of chance ; for, though Fernando
Knows not his parentage, yet accident
May have reveal'd the son to Procida.
View then these nuptials thus. If solemnised,
Joy not without regrets—if frustrated,
Regrets with yet their solaces.

ISOLINE.

I will, sir.

GOVERNOR.

Do so; and so good night. Another word.
Set not thy heart on seeing him again;
He never may return. Or say he should,
Expect him to depart and come no more.
You mark?

ISOLINE.

I do, sir.

GOVERNOR.

Now good night again.

[Goes out.]

ISOLINE.

What, Marguerite!—Come hither, Marguerite.
Hast done it? (*To MARGUERITE, who enters.*)

MARGUERITE.

He is in the oratory.

ISOLINE.

I thank the holy man. He will remain there?

MARGUERITE.

Ay, madam.

ISOLINE.

He was ever good to me.
Fernando will return to-night—I know
He will. My heart doth prophesy he will,
And lovers' hearts a strange foreknowledge have,
Though they read not the stars. That's he! Go, look!
(*MARGUERITE goes out.*)

O, that this hour were past! Alas, 'tis thus
We wish us ever nearer to our graves,
With fear of this, and with desire for that,

Flying from one thing, following another,
As rushing from the very thing itself
For which we pray, towards that we pray against !
Knew I the moment—ay, the very moment
I wedded him—I should be spouse to death,
Away with life ! at once he should be mine !

Enter MARGUERITE.

MARGUERITE.

'Tis not Fernando.

ISOLINE.

Keep upon the watch. [MARGUERITE goes out.
He shall be mine ! Shall private enmities
On others' parts set bars 'twixt those that love ?
Make of two hearts, grown one, two hearts again
Distinct and alienate ? Or rather—for
Judging mine own Fernando's heart by mine,
That can't be done—untwine two lives, which love
Has drawn together till they grow like tendrils,
Knotted and interwreathed, that without bruising
You cannot part them—may be killing them ?
It should not be and shall not. Now the chances ?
No let can I divine to sway Fernando,
Except that father, yet he knows not of,
And whom, new found, new feelings welcoming,
Will at the moment large surrender make,
Haply at cost of love itself ! What then !
Love that is steadfast brooks not sacrifice.
It may submit a while ; but, in the end,
It ever claims its own—the paramount
Of all affections ! So, his love, at first

O'ercome, anon will vindicate itself.
Whereto no weak retreating, no false shame
On the part of mine, shall offer hindrance to me,
From giving't all my help.

Enter MARGUERITE.

MARGUERITE.

I hear a step.

ISOLINE.

Go see if it be his. (*MARGUERITE goes out.*) Why should I blush
To own mine honest love? Is love a thing
To blush for?—Love!—the sacred root of all
The household pure affections, things of truth
And piety next what we owe to Heaven.
Love that makes friendship poor—that mocks enhancement—
Itself possession endless! That's example
Of loyalty! Its master better served
Than monarchs on their thrones, his throne himself!
That more abounds in sunshine of content,
Than destiny in clouds to quench the light.
Whole in itself! Love, that is chastity
Of more than vestal perfectness! The world
For choice, yet one with leave of Heaven selecting
And giving all the rest to negligence!
As the refiner the alloy, when once
He finds the extracted gold. He shall be mine!
The maid that's not stanch stickler for her love
Hath little on't to strive for. She may smile
Scornful good-bye, and turn upon her heel;
Forget and love again; or think she does—
For by the love I feel she knows not love.
My love's a heap takes all my heart to hold,
As rich as large, and shan't be cast away.

Re-enter MARGUERITE.

MARGUERITE.

'Tis he!—I beckon'd him. He follows me.

ISOLINE.

Take stand behind the hanging stealthily,
And there keep watch. And ever recollect
You are mine honour's sentinel, and bound
To let thine eye no parley hold with sleep,
So much as e'en a wink. As open as
Your eye, your ear; to note whate'er may pass
And in thy memory to book it down,
And faithfully; for, on some syllable
May something hang, which in esteem I hold
Next to my soul's salvation. Quick! He comes.

(MARGUERITE *hides*—FERNANDO *enters*.)

ISOLINE (*after a pause*).

Fernando, art thou there?

FERNANDO.

Ay, Isoline.

ISOLINE.

Art thou indeed?

FERNANDO.

I am.

ISOLINE.

I note thee speak,
Yet can't believe thee there.

FERNANDO.

Why?

ISOLINE..

Why, Fernando?

If but the morning, noon, or afternoon,

Withheld thee from me, when thou camest again,
Thine eyes did dance, thy breath grew scant, thy cheek
Did change its blood for frost, and I was met
Like new-found, wondrous treasure. Yesterday
It had been so.—What hath befallen to-day
To make it look so utterly unlike
Its happy fellow? Dost not joy, Fernando,
To see me?

FERNANDO.

Joy!—Ay, as the mariner
To see the day o'erta'en by storm at night,
But knows 'tis vain, his vessel foundering!

ISOLINE.

Explain thy speech, my love.

FERNANDO.

He was a friend
Who took me hence; a most dear friend, although
One that I wot not of until to-day,—
None other than a father, Isoline!

ISOLINE.

Thou hast found a father?

FERNANDO.

I have found a father;
And with that father I have held such converse
As hath transform'd me so, except my love
I should not know myself; and being thus
Dissimilar to him this morning was
Thy bridegroom, from this night that should have been
Our bridal-night, all days and nights to come
Am nothing to thee thou mayst name, except
A merchant sailor for his argosie,

That holds possession of the rock whereon
She struck and went to pieces !

ISOLINE.

We must part !

Lovest thou me still, Fernando ?

FERNANDO.

Yes !

ISOLINE.

As ever ?

FERNANDO.

As ever !

ISOLINE.

Then, we do not part, my friend !

FERNANDO.

Is't Isoline that speaks ?

ISOLINE.

Yes ! Isoline !

The very maid thou know'st so call'd—a maid,
So chary of her virgin sanctity,
Thee, her betroth'd—thee, her almost espoused,
She challenges to tell the moment only
She gave thee licence, she would bar thee name,
Or blush to hear thee do so. Lo, the strait
She is in !—at such an hour—in such a place
To parley with thee, and the argument
Her grievance—thy default—default in love !
In love, Fernando ! thy default in that
Wherein that she fell short was the reproach
Thou still didst urge against her, to the day
The very hour she gave thee slow consent
To lead her to the priest.

FERNANDO.

Heaven witness !

ISOLINE.

Peace!

No words—save such as make reply to questions.

We part—why? Lies the reason at my door?

Am I to blame? Then fit we part. If not,

It is not fit! I have no right to suffer.

Suffer, Fernando!—Did you hear me?—Heavens!

The boon, with showers of tears and gusts of sighs

You won from me, I call it suffering,

To find you would not take! But I'm a woman,

Strong in the faculty your nobler sex

Advance large claims to, with most poor pretensions—

Once cleaving, cleaving still. We shall not part.

You think to leave me. Try! The cement, that

Becomes a portion of the thing it joins,

So that as soon you tear themselves apart

As them from it, not more tenaciously

Keeps hold than I! Peacemeal, they may disjoin us,

But perfect, never!

FERNANDO.

Isoline!

ISOLINE.

Fernando!

When I consented to become thy wife,

I gave myself to thee. A thousand rites

Not more had made me thine. I was thy wife

That very hour—that very minute! All

Ties of reserves, heeds, other interests,

That held my heart from thee I snapp'd at once,

And like a woman gave it thee entire!

Whole and for ever!—ay, so gave it thee,

Were I and all my race in slavery,
And it the ransom, which, on paying down,
The shackles would fall off—gall as they might,
They must remain. I could not take it back,
Not even if I would.

FERNANDO.

Nay, Isoline !

ISOLINE.

Nay, hear me out, Fernando. There is a ward
By nature set o'er the true woman's heart
Undream'd of by thy sex, except the few
Of the true manhood, that contemplate them
With delicate regards. Without that ward
Woman is won and lost, and lost and won,
As oft we see; but, with it, won—lost never;
Though won unworthily—a contradiction,
Yet proof of her pure nature ! which, it seems,
Falls to thy lot to test. You are here to take
The oath, I vow'd to take along with thee.

FERNANDO.

I cannot take it.

ISOLINE.

Cannot ! You have a voice
And organs apt to frame it into speech,
Most pliant ones, as I can testify !

FERNANDO.

I may not take it.

ISOLINE.

May not ! What are you ?
What are you, sir ! a ward, or a free man
Acting his part upon his own account—
Upon his own responsibility ?

FERNANDO.

I may not for thy sake.

ISOLINE.

For my sake, sir !

The sand of the very hour you gave me leave
To look to myself, is running still !—not half,
Not quarter out ! For shame, to wrong me first,
And then to mock me !

FERNANDO.

I must take an oath—

ISOLINE.

When?—where?—to whom? No matter ! You did vow
To me before to take an oath—and shalt.
And judge me worthily as you're a man !
But that I have a title to thy hand—
But that 'tis mine, upon the warranty
Of Earth and Heaven, that heard thee say 'twas mine—
Brought it the wealth and power of all the thrones
That glitter on the earth, and I could have it
By only asking for it—ere I could speak
The word, I'd choke, blacken before thee, fall
A corpse at thy feet !

FERNANDO.

Now let me speak ! To wed thee
Is wedding thee to misery !

ISOLINE.

Content ;
I will wed misery.

FERNANDO.

My Isoline,
Thou wouldst ally thee to a house, the foe
Of thee and all thy race !

ISOLINE.

Unto that house
Will I ally myself.

FERNANDO.

The consequences !

ISOLINE.

Be they the worst I am prepared for them.
I'll take them all on mine own head.

FERNANDO.

The strife that's sure to come !—Man as I am, my soul
Sickens to think on't.

ISOLINE.

Woman as I am,
I dare it to come on.

FERNANDO.

Rivers of blood
Will flow !

ISOLINE.

They are welcome, though my veins be breathed
To help the flood.—Redeem your promise, sir !

FERNANDO.

O, Isoline ! By this dear hand—

ISOLINE.

Hold off !

In the relation wherein now we stand,
I will not suffer even touch from thee !
Nor shalt thou trifle with me—for to speak
Or act, save to the point, is only trifling.
Here—in the oratory close at hand
Attends the holy man, whose offices
This morning we did crave and then forego.
Follow me to him. Take my hand before him ;
Plight with me troth for troth. Or here remain

'Till night gives up her watch to day, and then,
Departing hence, to crown thy bounty, leave me
A spotless maiden with a blasted name !

FERNANDO.

Thou couldst not dream of such perdition, and
To bring it on thyself !

ISOLINE.

Men cannot dream
What desperate things a desperate woman dreams,
Until they see her act them !

FERNANDO.

Desperate !

ISOLINE.

Yes, desperate ! Sweet patience ! Men go mad
To lose their hoards of pelf, when hoards as rich
With industry may come in time again !
Yet they go mad—it happens every day.
Have not some slain themselves ? Yet if a maid—
Who finds that she has nothing garner'd up
Where she believed she had a heart in store
For one she gave away—is desperate,
You marvel at her ! Marvel ! When the mines
Of all the earth are poor as beggary
To make her rich again ! Am I ashamed
To tell thee this ?—No !—Save the love we pay
To Heaven, none purer, holier, than that
A virtuous woman feels for him she'd cleave
Through life to. Sisters part from sisters—brothers
From brothers—children from their parents—but
Such woman from the husband of her choice
Never !—Give me the troth you promised me.

FERNANDO.

Never didst thou reflect that I was born
In Sicily?

ISOLINE.

I know thou'rt a Sicilian.

FERNANDO.

Didst ne'er reflect upon it?

ISOLINE.

To what end
Should I reflect?

FERNANDO.

To spurn me as a man
Devoid of honour!

ISOLINE.

Who dares call thee so?

FERNANDO.

He who dares speak the truth. Thou know'st—thou
must—

The wrongs my country suffers!

ISOLINE.

Yes: I know

She suffers wrongs. I have wept for them, Fernando.

FERNANDO.

Have you?—Have you wept for them? I have heard them
Without a tear!—Am I a man of honour?

ISOLINE.

What good were it to weep?

FERNANDO.

None—but to feel

As you could weep—and then, with manlier thought,
Let fiery revenge instead of pity

Start into your eye and look the wronger dead !
That—that were good. It were becoming, too,
In one who owes his birth to Sicily.
I have not done so ! O, I have play'd a part
Most mean and spiritless ! Have proffer'd smiles
Where it behoved me to hurl frowns ! exchanged
Kind speech for curses, and grip'd hands with men,
With whom, had I clash'd daggers, I had done
The proper thing ! What must men think of me ?
Is there a lip I know, which, did it speak
The heart of the owner, would not curl at me ?
O, God ! to be despised ! regarded as
A thing, the man who understood himself
Would use his foot to ! To despise one's self !
That's it ! The scorn of all the world beside
I could endure, had I mine own content.
But that is lost. No man can call me worse
Than I do know myself.

ISOLINE.

Fernando—

FERNANDO.

Nay !

Suffer me speak, for it relieves my heart !
And as you love me—which I know you do—
Do not gainsay me ! I am a wretch more fit
To die than live !—and yet not fit to die !
For of all sins that on their heads men bear,
The heaviest, because the instrument
Of widest injury, are those which they
Commit against their country. I am fit
For nothing but a beacon to point out

The rock whereon my honour suffer'd wreck
That other men's may 'scape it.

ISOLINE.

Was that rock
Thy love for me?

FERNANDO.

Love?—Love?—What do I know
Of love? Where is the love I ought to bear
My country? Love?—It is a holy passion!
Generous!—exalted!—with integrity,
Lasting as adamant!—He can know nothing
Of love like that who does not love his country!

ISOLINE.

Lov'st thou not me?

FERNANDO.

Old Angelo Martini!

ISOLINE.

Lov'st thou not me?

FERNANDO.

Angelo, my old master,
Who taught me how to guard a life, and take one,
Was murder'd yesterday, because he slew
A miscreant—the foulest in the list
Of Infamy's pernicious sons! Was hunted
Like a wild beast that's from a thicket sprung
By dogs, and chased for sport! I might have saved him,
And didn't!—Why?—Because my heart was rotten!
I owed him manly knowledge—kindness—love.
He loved me as his son. I suffer'd them
To hunt him!—worry him to death! I did.
Am I a man at all?

ISOLINE.

Lovest thou not me?

FERNANDO.

Ay, Isoline, as much

As such a wretch can love!—Love thee?—I do,

And holily—if holy thing can dwell

In most unhallow'd habitation. Love thee?

How dare I love thee? Temple as thou art

Of tenderness, and chastity, and truth;

Truth most ingenuous! Is it thy arms

I should aspire to?—Thine, my Isoline!

Whose foot ne'er spurn'd from thee a thing so base

As that which now, in utter misery,

I cast before it.

[Dashing himself upon the ground.]

ISOLINE.

Rise, Fernando, rise,

My lord—my love! What has afflicted thee

To this severe extremity? Fernando!

Thou scarest me! This passion hath no reason!

'Tis wantonness of frenzy!—Dost thou hear me?

If not thyself, dear love—consider me!

That's right!—that's kind!—Give me thy hand and rise.

I dream'd not this. Thank Heaven you're calmer! O

I thought I loved thee all that I could love,

But now I find my love, disdaining bounds,

Is endless and unfathomable. Now

I find I loved thee but a little, and

With that remain'd contented; never dreaming

How misery endears, and what a heap

Of love was yet to come in company

With thy affliction. What shall I do for thee?

I am thy bane!—a blight—a canker to thee!

Shall I die? *[Plucks a dagger from his girdle.]*

FERNANDO.

Hold!—Stop!—Nay let my dagger go!

ISOLINE.

You have grip'd hands, you said, with those with whom

You ought to have clash'd daggers, and 'twas done

For me!—Don't hurt me, dear Fernando! There!

[Lets go the dagger.]

FERNANDO.

Are you mad?

ISOLINE.

No!—Calm as you are—you shall see.

[Goes to the door, and throws it open.]

The door is free!—The first, the last embrace!

And go!

FERNANDO.

Part?—Never! Thou art in my arms!

Be this embrace the knot unites us ever!

Come woe!—come death!—come every kind of bane!

Thou pattern of devotion! Thou true woman!

Thou ruby worth a mine, and fitly set!

Which is the way?—Where bides the holy man?

Is that the portal to the oratory?

What means thy cheek by dropping on my breast?

Does it say "Yes"?—Hold up, mine own dear love,

And come along. We'll kneel to Heaven to-night,

And trust to it for to-morrow.—Come, love, come.

[They go out.]

END OF ACT THIRD.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

A Chamber in the Castle.

Enter LE CLERC and FRANCOIS.

FRANCOIS.

I NEVER saw a feast resembled it !

LE CLERC.

Liker a mourning, sir, where people wake
The dead ; and to my thought, the bridegroom was
The corse ; the body whence the soul had fled ;
And whereupon the bride look'd vacantly
Like widow at her husband on a bier,
In whose deep woe the signs are swallow'd up,
While those around look on and show they grieve !

FRANCOIS.

When were their nuptials solemnized ?

LE CLERC.

Last night,
And very privately. You did not know—
You are but new arrived from Syracuse ?

FRANCOIS.

Only in time to see the festival,
If I may call it so, in honour of them.

LE CLERC.

You know not then their nuptials were appointed
For yesterday—were on the very eve
Of taking place ; nor what prevented them ?

FRANCOIS.

No.

LE CLERC.

This way, then, and I will tell you. Here
Are company might interrupt us. Come ! [*They go out.*

Enter MARTEL and AMBROSE.

MARTEL.

Abstraction of that hue ne'er saw I yet
In one so high in favour with good fortune !
Excess of happiness, like that of grief,
Will palsy feeling, till the owner seems not
To know how hugely blest he is ; but still
Some token shows the nature of the lapse.
Here, none. Within the table's breadth of him
I sat, and mark'd him. 'Twas not feasting, sir ;
He seem'd as he were jealous of the viands,
Like one upon his guard 'gainst poison'd meats.
He did not eat, but taste ; while, at his side,
His bride—whose eyes, purveyors never weary
Of catering for their lord, did range and range
The table over, to select for him
Whate'er was daintiest—with busy lips,
Like pages who their errands blushing tell,
Did ever and anon commend to him
The well-selected cheer, but all in vain.

AMBROSE.

I craved his leave to pledge him in a cup.
He took the cup ; but, straight its use forgetting,
Began to pore upon the rich contents :
Then, as a thing one does mechanically,
Raising it to his lip, without the due

And custom'd courtesy, he quaff'd it off
And set it down again.

MARTEL.

Remark'd you not
How strainingly he fix'd upon the door
His eyes, whene'er it chanced to open, as
He look'd for one to enter, he had rather
Should keep away?

AMBROSE.

That struck me very much,
And brought to mind the unwelcome visitor,
Broke in upon his nuptials yesterday.

MARTEL.

So was't with me. For him, or some one like him,
Be sure he look'd, with more of certainty
Than doubt.—The bride and bridegroom, and alone!
Let us withdraw nor mar their privacy. [They go out.]

Enter FERNANDO and ISOLINE.

FERNANDO.

You are right, my love; the grape is generous,
And, used in the wise proportion, cheers the heart.

ISOLINE.

You are better!—are you not?

FERNANDO.

Much!—very much!

ISOLINE.

O, blessed union that of two makes one!
Could I, dear love, have bought the world just now
By paying down for it one hearty smile,
I must have lost the bargain, seeing thee
Without one! It was otherwise before!

How often have I smiled at that same want !
But, now, comes o'er your looks the slightest cloud,
All light of mine is gone.—Fernando !—Love !
Is it not sweetest partnery ?

FERNANDO.

It is.

ISOLINE.

It is, indeed, my love ! Say as I do !

It is, indeed, most sweet !

FERNANDO.

Indeed it is.

Was't not the castle portal open'd now ?
I know its ponderous sound ! 'Tis shut again !
Yes ; it was it !

ISOLINE.

Whom look you for, dear love ?

All your good spirits gone ?

FERNANDO.

No, Isoline ;

Not all of them !—not half !—not any of them !

We'll spend the evening joyously, dear love !

Out-do the god of merriment himself ;

And when he's out of laughter lend him some

And still ourselves hold on ! Who's there ?

Enter EUGENE and OTHERS.

EUGENE.

My lord,

We are passing to the ball-room.

FERNANDO.

Pray pass on.

And keep the measure up !

EUGENE.

We will, my lord.

[Going out with others.]

FERNANDO.

That's right ; and so will I !

ISOLINE.

So do, dear love !

For me !—Your Isoline !—your bride !—your wife !—

FERNANDO.

You are my wife !—The treasure of my heart
Is treasure of my arms ! Who is rich as I,
And says he is not happy ? Then is he
Beyond the ministering of content,
And be despair his portion ! I am not
A man like that.

ISOLINE.

My love, this cheer makes sad.

FERNANDO.

Makes sad ?

ISOLINE.

It is not of the kind gives cheer.
It wants a quiet.

FERNANDO.

Wants a quiet ?—Here
Lay on my brow this white and velvet hand
Thou gavest me yesterday.

ISOLINE.

It burns, dear love ;
And yet how pale it is !

FERNANDO.

I have seen a man
In fever—he did burn, and yet was pale—
Pale as a corpse.

ISOLINE.

Thou hast no fever ?

FERNANDO.

No.

The cup has pass'd too often to my lips—
Not much—only a time or two !—What proves
A spark to one, another finds a fire.
Don't heed it, dearest life !—Heaven, what a hand !
Were it ethereal, yet were given to sense,
What could be spared of it, or added to it ? [It does !
Shape ?—No ! Hue ?—No ! Touch ?—No ! Does it breathe ?
The airs of Heaven ! I will inhale them nearer !

[Kissing her hand.]

ISOLINE.

You flatter, dearest lord !

FERNANDO.

No, by my love.

ISOLINE.

Yea, by your love, indeed, dear lord, you do !
You are a culprit, who for witness calls
The arch accomplice that would swear him off.

FERNANDO.

By all—(LOUIS *enters.*) Ha !—'Sdeath, you tread on tiptoe,
You are at my elbow ere I think you there ! [sir,

LOUIS.

Your pardon ! I was musing, sir, and thus
Moved slow. 'Tis strange ! but in the ball-room, now,
One cross'd me in a mask, and made me start,
By something in his carriage and his form
Resembling one I must have met, but where
I cannot recollect. Whoe'er it was,
A fearful feeling that cross'd o'er my heart
Assures me 'twas no friend.

FERNANDO.

What ? Seem'd he old
Or young ?

LOUIS.

Men's figures do not tell their years
Well as their faces do ; yet would I say,
Guessing thereby his progress on life's road,
He was more near the end than setting out.

FERNANDO.

Commanding in his air ?

LOUIS.

Very.

FERNANDO.

His gait
Of most assured tread ?

LOUIS.

As he did spurn
The ground he walk'd on. He and I have met,
But when, or where, or upon what occasion,
I can't recal, nor rest until I do.
Farewell, and pardon me. 'Tis very strange ! [*Goes out.*]

ISOLINE (*to FERNANDO, who is lost in thought*).

Dear husband, what is it possesses you ?

FERNANDO.

Nothing !

ISOLINE.

O, love, be honest !—It is best
Always.—If evil comes of it, at worst
We have been honest—that will comfort us.
Come !—I will show you, what I teach, I do.
I don't believe our union will be blest.

You start !—and you yourself did tell me so,
And now I tell it you !—I don't believe it.
What then ?—Do I repent our union ? No !
My heart has had its wish—I am thy wife.
Knew I that I should die the very moment
The priest should bless us and declare us one,
I had married thee and yielded up my spirit,
Thanking the gracious Heavens, most bountiful,
Which for that little moment made thee mine.
Then cheer thee, love ; and be assured of this—
Were we to live the three-score years and ten,
And then to die, being what now we are,
We could not die more happy. Lose not *now*
With care for *by-and-by*, whate'er may come ;
But leave 't with trust to Heaven !

FERNANDO.

I'll do thy will !
I'll be myself !—The ball-room !—Come, love, come !

SCENE II.

A Ball-Room.

FERNANDO, ISOLINE, and OTHERS, *discovered*,—*A Dance.*

FERNANDO.

Surely the lightsomest, most graceful form,
And act of merriment ! I'd give the world
To have the mood of him who danced just now.
How he did seem to poise him in the air,

As he could hang there at his will, by which
Alone he seem'd to come to earth again !
He did not spring, but fly, from step to step !
With joints that had not free-er play'd, methinks,
Were hinges made of air and theirs were such !
Yet could they plant themselves, I warrant me,
To meet a shock ! These spirits are fine things,
Subtle as quicksilver ; only they freeze
Sooner than water ; one cold breath, and ice !

ISOLINE.

Will you not dance ?

FERNANDO.

No.

ISOLINE.

'Tis expected, love,
Upon your nuptial day.

FERNANDO.

I would not dance.

ISOLINE.

No more would I, dear love, to please myself ;
But we must help the mirth that's made for us,
And else will flag, and die. A feast, in this,
Is like a fray, wherein the side is lost
Whose leader is not foremost, cheering it.
For my sake only ! I must bear the blame
Seem you to lack content. They will believe
You do repent you of your bargain, love.
Would you like that ?—What had you done a month
Ago, had I refused to dance with you ?
How had you look'd as all the world were lost ;
Urged me again—again ; at every turn
Your voice yet more attuning to the tone

That melts ; invoking me in the dear name
Of pity and whate'er is kin to her.
I had heard, in these things, marriage turns the tables,
And she that once was woo'd must come to woo,
But little dream'd to find it out so soon.

FERNANDO.

Sweet love, we'll dance ! Thy fair hand give to me,
And, with it, give thy pardon.

ISOLINE.

There, Fernando.

A set !—a set !—The bride and bridegroom's set !
Partners !—Your fair friends, gentlemen—a set
To try the breath !—Hò, music there !—a strain
Of brilliant figure !

(PROCIDA, in the dress of a cavalier, and masked, appears
opposite to FERNANDO, who at once recognises him.)

MARTEL.

Hear you, sirs ? The bride
Commands the dance—your very newest strain,
So 'tis the choicest, too. We are ready, madam,
So please you take your place.

ISOLINE.

Fernando, what's
The matter !—Who is he you gaze upon ?
Do you know him ?

FERNANDO.

Don't you recollect him ?

ISOLINE.

No—
Not in that mask. Who is he ?

FERNANDO.

Never mind.

ISOLINE.

His presence troubles you ! Whoe'er he is
I'll have him straight remov'd.

FERNANDO.

Not for the world !
He wants me !

ISOLINE.

Let him wait till by-and-by !
I'll speak to him myself and pray him go,
And come some other time.

FERNANDO.

Stay, Isoline !
I would not for a mine thou spokest to him !
I'll speak to him myself !

ISOLINE.

Remember, love,
The dance is waiting.

FERNANDO.

Were't a King that waited,
He must, until I spoke to him that's yonder !
Where can I take him to ?—to be alone ?

ISOLINE.

The garden.

FERNANDO.

Right ! When we have made an end,
By the west door he can depart unseen.

ISOLINE.

O, husband !

FERNANDO.

Let me have my way in this,
For I must ! Look, love ! Not surer to thy wrist
Is knit thy hand than I am knit to thee !

They cannot sever us, but I must perish !
So now, no let, love, if you value me !

ISOLINE.

Our friends, who look for us—

FERNANDO.

He looks for me !

Women, they say, are at invention quick—

Prove it so now, and never more be need ;

And be my sweet apologist. [Crosses to PROCIDA.

Say naught,

But follow me !

[PROCIDA and FERNANDO disappear
among the Company.

ISOLINE.

Your pardon, friends, I pray you.

One, in some case of keenest urgency,

That needs my husband's presence, takes him hence.

Pray you proceed. I'll play the looker-on

'Till he repairs his fault to you and me,

Taking his promised place. The music, there !

A Dance.

LOUIS (*entering hastily*).

Break off the dance !—An enemy is here !

Lady, I have recall'd the name of him

Whose presence struck me so unwelcomely—

A foe, the subtlest and most powerful

That France could find in Sicily ! When lately

On mission from the King I did sojourn

At the court of Spain, came thither a Sicilian

With charges foul 'gainst France, and praying aid

To second some great blow, he said, the friends
Of Sicily did meditate. That man
Was he whose form came o'er my spirits like
An apparition, even now—his name
Is John di Procida ! I have alarm'd
The guard ; apprised your father of his danger,
And search is now on foot which all must join.

[*The Company at once disperse in various directions
—occasionally passing to and fro in the Back
Ground.*]

ISOLINE.

Ambrose !—Le Clerc ! Sirs, you are men of honour.
You know me, too, a woman of that kin.
You'll do my bidding, whatsoe'er it is ?

AMBROSE *and* LE CLERC.

Yes ; by these tokens. [*Kissing the hilts of their swords.*]

ISOLINE.

Good sirs, follow me ! [*They go out.*]

SCENE III.

The Garden of the Castle.

Enter PROCIDA and FERNANDO.

FERNANDO.

Now, sir, your will with me ?

PROCIDA.

That's right ! I am glad
Thou dardest not call me father ! 'Tis a sign

Thou hast a sense of shame, and that's a virtue,
Although a poor one, fitter far to weep at
Than smile at. You have done your father's will ?
You are ready for that oath ?

FERNANDO.

I'll not deny
My disobedience, sir.

PROCIDA.

You'll not deny ?
You can't!—You have married her ! Yet, if my son,
Though in the one engagement thou hast fail'd,
Thou yet wilt keep the other.

FERNANDO.

Take that oath ?
I cannot now !

PROCIDA.

You can !—You ought !—You shall !

FERNANDO.

I am a man, sir !

PROCIDA.

Ay ? What kind of one ?

FERNANDO.

Maybe a weak one ; yet I dare abide
The issue of my weakness, and I will.
Not breaking trust with those it has misled
To knit their fates to mine.

PROCIDA.

You call this manhood ?

Ay, in a man not worth the name of one !
How dardest thou prate of keeping trust to me,
With whom thou hast so vilely broken trust ?
So lately, too ! Thou promisedst yesterday

Bring back a son to me ! Where is he, sir ?
Why must I come to seek him, and, instead,
Behold a recreant !

FERNANDO.

Better, sir, we part,
Than hold discourse on terms unequal thus,
That I must bear alone, and you inflict.

PROCIDA.

No ! We won't part ! You come along with me !

FERNANDO.

Never !

PROCIDA.

As you're my son I'll have it so !

FERNANDO.

I'll not forsake the woman of my soul,
Who to my bosom hath herself surrendered.
Come woe ! Come shame ! Come ruin ! True to me,
I'll not forsake her ! Yea, come death, I'll clasp her
Long as my breast doth heave !

PROCIDA.

You think this manhood
Again ? Sir ! 'tis not what a man dares do,
Nor what's expected from him by a man,
But what Heaven orders him to do,—'tis that
He should do. Heaven expects we keep its laws ;
May we make league then with the foes of Heaven ?
Or having made it, may we keep it. No !—
Else we shall forfeit Heaven ! This base alliance
Is even such a league. Break it !

FERNANDO.

No !

PROCIDA.

No?—

Listen, degenerate boy! I'll tell thee that,
In tearing which from me thou dost as bad
As though my breast thou didst rip open, and
Pluck out my heart alive! You never knew
A mother?

FERNANDO.

I remember there was one,
Upon whose breast I used to lie.

PROCIDA.

'Twas she.

She had a mother's breast—the heart within
Becoming its fair lodge—adorning it
With all the sweet affections of her sex,
And holy virtues that keep watch for them!
Thou art like her! Dost thou mark? Thou art like her
And so, I saw thou wast, upon her lap; [now;
A little baby looking up at her!
Thou wast her first child, and her only one!
Thou mayst believe she loved thee!

FERNANDO.

Does she live?

PROCIDA.

No; did she live, I were not now, perhaps,
Debating with thee. Thou hadst granted her
What thou deniest me. Wouldst thou behold her?
Look here! Was that a woman?

[*Drawing a Miniature from his breast.*

FERNANDO.

Heavens! how fair!

PROCIDA.

Was that a woman ?

FERNANDO.

Yes !

PROCIDA.

No, boy ! She was

An angel !

[Putting up the miniature.]

FERNANDO.

Let me look again !

[PROCIDA holds it to FERNANDO, who takes it, and after looking at it is about to kiss it.]

PROCIDA.

Forbear !

Thou shalt not kiss it ! No, nor breathe upon it !
There is contact on thy lips, at thought of which,
Had she survived the ruin of my hold,
And now were living, that sweet face, thou seest
The limning of, had to the 'haviour turn'd
Of deadly loathing !—of black horror !—aught
That's removed farthest from that smile of Heaven !
Had any mock'd that face, what were he to thee ?

FERNANDO.

An enemy !

PROCIDA.

Had any smitten it ?

FERNANDO.

I had lopp'd his hand off, and then smitten him
To the heart !

PROCIDA.

Had any brought the blush upon it—
The burning blush which innocence endures,
Compell'd by him who does a deed so damn'd
That murder spurns it, will not bide with it ?

FERNANDO.

I had hack'd him limb from limb !—slain him by inches !

PROCIDA.

'Thou hadst ?

FERNANDO.

I had !

PROCIDA.

Back to the castle, then ;
To the room I brought thee from, the festal room,
Where for thy nuptials they keep holiday,
And when thou meet'st the master of the mirth,
The Governor—the father of thy wife—
Him thou art now a son to—tell him—mark me !
Tell him—that very—that identical man—
He was the miscreant, to thy mother did
That very shame !—then nerve thy filial arm,
And hack him limb by limb and inch by inch,
As though in every atom lay the heart
Of the accursèd spoiler.—Go !—Do that,
And then come back ; and kiss thy mother's face !

FERNANDO.

I hear and doubt I hear.

PROCIDA.

Then list again,
And doubt no more. 'Twas during a brief truce.
He was my guest—a guest's a sacred thing ;
But, if he is, a host is sacred too.
My wife with me did minister to him
The rites of hospitality—and what
Was the return ?—such love indulged for her,
As meditated bane of life to me !

He did not dare to breathe it—he but look'd it !
She saw what troubled her, and, like a wife
Perfect in honour—of herself best guardian—
At once refused her presence on some plea
That warded chance of quarrel, while it balk'd
Licentiousness of opportunity.
This when the truce was ended, she did tell me.
Dost thou breathe thick?—I do, and must take breath
For what's to come. You listen, do you not?
You look like stone !

FERNANDO.

I know not what I am !

PROCIDA.

Well !—War again.—Where was your father?—Where
Behoves a loyal subject be—in the ranks
Of the king when he takes the field.—You know we lost
The day. Palermo, Syracuse, Messina,
All bent the knee to the conqueror. Was I
His subject? No !—Was I a rebel to him?
No !—Why then should I be proscribed ?

FERNANDO.

Proscribed !

PROCIDA.

I was so !—Keep thy wonder ! What's behind
Will want it. Through the arts of that same man—
Of him thou now art knit up with through union
With his pernicious child—was thy own father
Proscribed. Have patience ! His possessions cast
At the feet of a licentious soldiery
To scramble for and ravage.

FERNANDO.

Infamy !

PROCIDA.

I say again have patience. " Infamy ! "
No, not at all—not worth a passing frown.
The deed's to come. My castle did remain ;
That, the arch-spoiler to himself reserved
For plunder—for thy mother shelter'd there !
She was the quarry which this bird of prey
Had mark'd out for his pounce—which, when he saw
'Twas sure, he made !—swept down with ruthless wing,
When none was near to cleave him ere he struck,
Or scare him from his prey ! Do you hear a shriek ?

FERNANDO.

Sir ?

PROCIDA.

Do you hear a shriek ?

FERNANDO.

No.

PROCIDA.

Are you sure ?

FERNANDO.

I am ; for never do I hear a shriek
But my heart leaps as through my breast 'twould burst
Its way ! I cannot bear to hear a shriek !

PROCIDA.

Thou heard'st thy mother's ! as the ravisher
Waved o'er thy head his coward blade, through terror
At thy impending death, to win from her,
What, sooner than yield up, she had lost herself
A hundred thousand lives !—She swoon'd away !
My heart turns sick, and my brain reels ! Thy arm !—

Away ! thou worse than matricide—thy touch
With a new horror strings my nerves anew !

FERNANDO.

Why was this tale reserved ?—not told before ?

PROCIDA.

Because I found thee apt, as I believed,
In taking up the hint of honour ; nor
Admitted fear it could be thrown away.
Life 's strong in me to tell the tale and live !
How she contrived escape, to tell it me,
It matters not—the last word cost her dear—
'Twas bought with her last breath.—You come with me ?

FERNANDO.

I am a doomed man !—My lot, on earth,
Is cast in utter misery !—For me,
Not in the wide world blooms that blessed spot
I can find comfort in !

PROCIDA.

Find Duty, boy ;
And take thy chance for comfort.

FERNANDO.

I can't leave her !
Do wrong to her did ever good to me !
I took her for all chance, and through all chance
I'll cleave to her. In cloud I wedded her,
And thunder shall not scare me from her now !
No blame is hers.—I swear that she is good.
Loves holily as heartily. Is a gem
Of crystal truth—a mine of every ore
Of excellence—a paragon of worth,

Well as a paragon of loveliness.
Is she her father's hand or foot, that you
Or I should spurn her for her father's fault?
High Heaven did frame her, as it frames us all,
Not of the temper of our parentage,
But of the attributes itself vouchsafes us.
Heaven framed her to be loved—if to be loved,
Then, cherish'd!—I have sworn to cherish her—
I'll keep my oath!—I will not give her up.

PROCIDA.

Then, must I leave thee to thy fate!

ISOLINE (*entering*).

Stop, sir!

You are John of Procida!

PROCIDA.

I am.

ISOLINE.

The foe
Of France; and, chiefly, of a son of hers
Who calls me child.

PROCIDA.

I am the foe of France,
And chiefly foe of him thou speakest of.

ISOLINE.

What madness brought thee hither?

PROCIDA.

Madness?—Right!
Hope of reclaiming a degenerate son,
Spell-bound by love where it behoves him loathe!

ISOLINE.

Your life's in jeopardy!—You are discover'd!

Come in there !—Gentlemen, you'll guard him safely,
And suffer none to question him or touch him ;
Nor must you leave him till he is thoroughly
Beyond the reach of danger.

PROCIDA.

Gracious Powers !

Do you rebuke me thus?—is't thus you show it ?

ISOLINE.

You are my enemy—and yet my father !
Father to him—to me a dearer self.
I'll answer with my life, sir, for the safety
Of every hair of your head.

PROCIDA.

Fernando !

FERNANDO.

Sir ?

PROCIDA.

Come hither !—Lady, place your hand in mine.
These hands that met, till now, against my will,
Now, with my will, I join, and add thereto
My blessing !—May I, Heaven ?—I ask too late !
'Tis done !—A promise, lady !

ISOLINE.

It is given !

PROCIDA.

See that it be fulfill'd. You will repair
To-night, ere at the zenith stops the moon,
There, westward of Messina, on the coast,
Where, when the waves and winds are boisterous,
The fishermen their little fleets embay,
And, in their snug huts nestling at their ease,

Smile and grow jocund at the storm without.
You know the place?

ISOLINE.

I do—I will be there!

PROCIDA.

And so will I—and you shall find a friend!

[They go out severally.]

END OF ACT FOURTH.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

*A Bay near Messina.—The Sea.—Fishermen's Boats ; in the
offing a Fleet.—Moonlight.*

Enter JOHN OF PROCIDA *and* GUISCARDO.

PROCIDA.

YOU look your news ! 'Tis dire, but not unwelcome,
Nor out of place nor out of season, that
Men should cry " God forbid ! "—That is, good men.
It is the scourging, at report of which,
Men that rely on Heaven, upon their breasts
Do cross their arms and, shuddering, look up,
In dread, yet gratitude. Chance has outdone
Foresight ; and preparation, looking on
With idle hands, can scarce believe its eyes
To see the work it labour'd for fulfill'd
Almost without its aid. Tell me again
The cause and manner of the massacre ;
And leisurely. What you related now
Seems like a dream, which he that has awaked from 't
Tries to recal, but finds the substance vapour,
Which in the tracing of it—vanishes !
You said, the hour of the vespers ?

GUISCARDO.

Yes ; that hour,

That annual hour religiously observed
In Sicily, our tyrants made a plea
For new and worse aggression. On pretence
Our act of piety might mask revolt,
Assembling in such numbers ; though we held
Our warrants in our hands, our wives and children,
Which, who that loved them, would to strokes expose
From swords and knives in sudden tumult drawn,
Where rage might miss a foe and smite a friend !

PROCIDA.

Well ; upon this pretence, orders, you said,
Were pass'd to search for arms—

GUISCARDO.

O Heaven, the acts
Of an unbridled soldiery—of men
Who reckon war a game—regarding all
The charities—the tender charities
Of human life—as stakes !—Interpreting
This order by the hint of most depraved
And devilish appetite, the myrmidons
Of France presented to amazed Palermo,
O'er-acted in her streets, exposure, which
Her liberal haunts keep close—attested by
The shrieks of maids and matrons, powerless
With loathing and affright ; whose friends look'd on,
Aghast with rage that knew not where to turn.

PROCIDA.

Go on !—I see it !

GUISCARDO.

Know you one Venoni,
The son of Nicolo Venoni ?

PROCIDA.

No;
But knew his father well.

GUISCARDO.

He married lately,
And his young bride, accompanying him
To church, was thus encounter'd. Now, Venoni,
That kind of spirit is endow'd with, which,
If once 'tis chafed, serves its own impulse solely,
Reckless of cost. As a high-temper'd horse
That's rashly given the spur, throws off all guidance
Save that of its own fury; spikes itself
Upon a palisade, plunges into
A flood, or dashes o'er a precipice
As soon as keep the road. With naked hand
He struck the caitiff down!

PROCIDA.

'Twas like the son
Of his father!—'Twas well done!

GUISCARDO.

How one brave man
Showing himself will make a thousand brave
That play'd the hound before! The miscreant
At once was stoned to death. His fellows, seeing,
For the first time, how, more from habitude
Than proper power, a handful sways a crowd,
To save themselves took straight to flight. And now
The uproar!—While the guard did beat to arms,
The citizens, the women and their fry
Huddling into their houses, without heed

Whether their own or neighbours', and, as freely,
Such weapons snapping up as came to hand,
Trebled in numbers from the rousing cry
Of the exploit, which ran like wildfire through
The city, shouting for Enfranchisement,
Vengeance, and Freedom, towards the citadel,
Devoted, moved—one street of waving blades!

PROCIDA.

The sight did slay their enemies!

GUISCARDO.

It did!

PROCIDA.

No monster half so dire as that which meets
The eye of tyranny, when it beholds
Its thralls make stand against it all at once,
While at its foot it thought them! They o'erthrew
The garrison?

GUISCARDO.

O'erthrew?—Ay, did they, sir,
As the red flood of Etna would a wall
With touching it. Then came the Massacre,
'Mid yells for quarter, answer'd by despair.
The strugglings then—the blows—the kinds of death!
Some falling by a single stroke, and some
By none at all but grasp of strangling horror.
By pieces some despatch'd—gash upon gash—
Their bodies hack'd, yet Life without a wound.
How variously they met their fate—some mad,
Some as all sense were lapsed, some seeking it—
Some flying from it; and with all the signs
As the blood works in such extremity!

Some, pale as ashes ; some, with face on fire ;
Some, black as though with premature congealing !
Here tears ; there scowls ; there laughter—yes, I saw
Some that did die with laughter ! Some did groan
And some did shriek. Most died with curses. Few
With prayers, and they were mix'd with imprecations.
Not one encounter'd death with constancy,
But all as to its pangs were superadded
The sharper stings of conscience.

PROCIDA.

Mercy, Heaven,
Upon their souls !

GUISCARDO.

Their wives and children, now ——

PROCIDA.

Don't tell me that again ! I shudder still !
The work of slaughter should have stopp'd at them.
Woman and Infancy have Nature's word
Against the blows of men whom she made strong
For their protection. It is damage done
Irreparable to a righteous cause,
Which, else, all men contemporary with it,
As well as all to come had wholly lauded.
It is a glorious page in history,
So blotted, men will say of it, hereafter,
As well as now, “ Better it ne'er were written ! ”

GUISCARDO.

Nay, John of Procida, that friend whose zeal
Despatch'd me to you, and your trust in whom
Made him the master of your hiding-place—
For, it behoved you, being what you are,

The friend of Sicily, like a wild beast
To house—that friend, with other thoughts than yours
Beheld the work of vengeance. In the midst
His voice was loudest, “Death to all that’s French!
Spare not—nor sex—nor age!”

PROCIDA.

I love the zeal,
But hate the excess.

GUISCARDO.

Think ’twas the lava, sir;
And had it been, what then would you have said?
But, that it was the hand of Heaven stretch’d forth
Most righteously. For when was mercy shown
To us or ours by them? To say no more,
Our sisters, wives, and daughters, with their cheeks
Burning at shames, to think on, drives us mad,
Cried for atonement not one tittle short
Of that which we exacted! Be prepared.
Palermo marches on Messina. Not
A minute but she’s nearer, by the strides
Impatient vengeance takes, with first success
Flush’d and invigorated. You are look’d for,
As soul and limb of the enterprise. Beware,
The fire you wish to blaze, you put not out,
By damping it. For me, my sword abstains
From nothing that owns kindred with the blood
Whose pestilent nature, worse than pestilence,
Has scourged my native land. Look to yourself,
Fernando! (*Rushes out.*)

PROCIDA.

By that name they call my son!

Is he devoted? Friend!—No! Let me think!
No; better I remove him from the rage
I might in vain attempt to mitigate;
They shall depart together. Who goes there?
Francisco?

Enter FRANCISCO (a Sailor).

FRANCISCO.

Yes.

PROCIDA.

You keep your time. Where lies
The boat?

FRANCISCO.

In the shade of yonder jutting rock
On which the moonbeam strikes.

PROCIDA.

'Tis well; when those
With whom I mean to freight her shall arrive,
I'll summon you; when they are safe bestow'd,
Pull for the fleet, right to the Admiral's ship.
Away and watch. [FRANCISCO goes.] Nature forebodes a shock.
She is not herself, but motionless and still,
Like one that holds his breath with strong suspense.
Etna seems dead, as though her fires were out.
At morn I watch'd her, and again at noon,
At sunset last; I could not see a reek;
No, not so much as the light gauzy wreath
Shook from the veil which vaporous night hath left,
And morning, lifting with his glowing hand,
Melts, as he touches, into viewless air!
Charybdis holds her peace and Scylla sleeps!
The welkin does not stir. A heaviness,

Stillness, and silence, all unwonted, and
Portentous, hold possession of the world
As on the eve of some great prodigy !

FERNANDO *and* ISOLINE *enter.*

FERNANDO.

Who is there ?

PROCIDA.

A friend.

FERNANDO.

My father ?

PROCIDA.

Yes, my son.

You are come in time. Methinks not yet the moon
Hath topp'd the hill of night. How is it, lady ?
You seem to droop ?

ISOLINE.

'Tis very sultry, sir.

I never felt the like. There's not a breath.

PROCIDA.

No; not a breath, indeed. 'Tis a deep calm.
Wilt trust me, lady, as a friend ?

ISOLINE.

I will !

As better than a friend—a father, sir.

The father of my husband !—by that title
In a brief hour almost as much endear'd
As he who call'd me daughter all my life.

PROCIDA.

A most sweet nature ! Slaughter shall not force
The house of such a heart. Fernando !

FERNANDO.

Sir ?

PROCIDA.

Anon a storm will burst upon Messina
More fierce than ever yet the elements
Did in their fury breed. Do you see a cloud ?

FERNANDO.

No.

PROCIDA.

Understand me, then.

FERNANDO.

I understand you !

PROCIDA.

It brings no squall, no bolt, yon fleet need fear.
There you shall house to-night—your bride as well.

FERNANDO.

My father—

PROCIDA.

Peace!—Believe I love you, lady ;
Not that I say so, but that I will show you
The deeds of love. Behoves it, though, at present,
You give me credit on my word alone,
And largely, too.

ISOLINE.

To what amount you will.
Provided, should you fail—and that, I am sure,
Would be the shame of fortune and not yours,—
My losses only light upon myself.

PROCIDA.

'Tis frankly answer'd. Frankly, then, thus far
Give me your confidence on trust alone,
To change, to-night, your lodging for a berth.
On board a barque that rides in yonder fleet,
Whereof the chief bears me a brother's love,
Which I, with the like, return. Hard by there waits

A boat, and he that holds your hand e'en now,
And has most right to it of all the world,
Shall go along with you.

FERNANDO.

O father, thanks !

ISOLINE.

For what, dear husband ? Those were hearty thanks !
Such payment waits not on small benefits.
What heavy debt do you and I incur
By sleeping, love, on board yon fleet to-night,
That you acknowledge it so largely ?

FERNANDO.

Nay !

Question not, sweet ! but come !

ISOLINE.

Nay ; by your leave,
I'll think a little first. The thanks you pay
Mind me of thanks which I myself do owe
And ought to pay as well as you.—Did we lodge
With a mere friend—a friend of every day—
The common'st friend—we would not leave his house
Without “ Good-bye and thank you.” I have lived
With a good friend of mine for twenty years—
One that did cause me make his house my own ;
As welcome to it every bit as much
As he himself !—Should I treat such a friend
Worse than I would a friend of every day ?
No, love.—I'll go.—But you and I must bid
“ Good-bye and thank you ” to my father first.

PROCIDA (*aside*).

That note doth jar the tune that now ran sweet !

ISOLINE.

What is't offends your father, that he frowns
And moves with step disturb'd ? What angers him ?
I see ! I see !—I must return to mine.

FERNANDO.

It may not be !

ISOLINE.

Nay, by your leave, it must !
And say it must, dear love ! Oh, make me not
The thing I would not be—a froward wife.
'Tis time enough for that—if e'er that come,
Which I'll be bound 'twill never, with my will.
I would not for a thousand thousand worlds
Gainsay you any time, and chiefly now,
Just when I have paid my freedom down for you.
Oh, be a gentle master to me, love !
Don't overtask me, lest the duty, which
'Twere sweetness to discharge, grows weariness,
And I do cast the heavy burden down
I lack the strength to bear.

FERNANDO.

This once be ruled !
Only this once, and I'll obey you, love,
For all my life to come ! Give you command,
And try to overtask me, if you will,
And see if I complain—much less rebel.
Bear with me only now !

ISOLINE.

I will not, love,
Unless I know the reason ; and, when known,
Approve of it. Husband, deal fair with me.

Is't fit I do the thing my soul condemns ?
How may it fare with you ? Is she a wife
Who, as a daughter, fails ? She cannot be.
Duty is uniform where duty is,
And can no more with disobedience bide
Than honesty with fraud. Am I not right ?
Am I the guardian of your honour, love ?
Ay, before any one !—before yourself !
Then by myself must I approve the trust,
And make fidelity my law in all things.
I'll see my father ere I seek you fleet,
Or know the reason why I must not see him,
And find that reason right.

PROCIDA.

Yet more and more
It turns to discords !—Girl ! your husband's life
Depends on your obeying him.

ISOLINE.

Does mine ?

PROCIDA.

Yes.

ISOLINE.

And my father's, too ?—I'll answer—No.
I comprehend. Some storm that's gathering
Around my father, you would save me from,
And, to that end, would counsel me forsake him.
Forsake my father !—Sir, are you a father
To counsel so a child ? Is this the ruin
You told me of, and would have left me to,
Fernando ?—but you did not leave me !—No !—
You were mine own love still ! Sir, have you rule

Over the wind that brings this thunder cloud,
Divert it ! Think how merciful is Heaven,
And copy it ! My father is your foe,
But spare him—I spared you !

PROCIDA.

I would return
Your bounty, would you let me.

ISOLINE.

Could I let you,
On terms like yours, I were unworthy of it !
Plead for my father ! Will you not, Fernando ?
Do it !—He was a father, love, to you !

PROCIDA.

Do it, and think upon your mother, boy !
Are you a man ?—The boat lies round the rock ;
There stands your wife ; Destruction is at hand.
Seize her and snatch her from it !

ISOLINE.

If he dares !
'Twould make me hate him !—Yes, Fernando—love
Can turn to e'en as opposite a thing
As hate !—ay, in a moment !—Do not try it !

PROCIDA.

Listen, and learn the fate that threatens you,
And I would save you from ! The men that were
But yesterday the spaniels of the French,
To-day are bloodhounds that eat up their masters.
Palermo knows it ! Of thy country, all
That late drew breath in her have proved it—Man,
Woman, and Child ! The rule is Massacre !

And now the dogs, mad with the game of blood,
Hark hither to repeat it.—There they are !

ISOLINE.

Where ?

PROCIDA.

Don't you hear ?

ISOLINE.

I do !—a distant sound.

PROCIDA.

It is their yelping as they speed along
On foam with haste and fury. Save your wife !

ISOLINE.

Fernando, touch your wife and she's a corpse !
Make but the offer and she slays herself !
Which is the way ?—Point out the way to me—
The way to my father !—God ! which is the way ?

PROCIDA.

They'll intercept you ere you reach the town !

ISOLINE.

Were it the lava that came boiling on
I'd cross it to my father !

PROCIDA.

You forget
Your husband !

ISOLINE.

He is safe—my father not :
I now am wife to danger !

FERNANDO.

Isoline !

ISOLINE.

Ha !—Yes !—There 'tis !—That light—O, blessed light !

Blest though 'tis shining from a tomb !—I greet it
As never did I yet the rising sun. [*Rushes out.*]

PROCIDA (*stopping* FERNANDO).

Whither, my boy ?

FERNANDO.

Father, to bring her back,
Or share her fate !

PROCIDA.

Fernando !

FERNANDO.

Better die
Than live—and, honour dead—nay, manhood dead,
Still bear thy name, living of all mankind
The execration ! Farewell, father !

PROCIDA.

Stop !

Embrace me ere you go !

FERNANDO (*struggling with* PROCIDA).

Nay, father !

PROCIDA.

Nay,

But I will hold thee, boy !

FERNANDO.

She vanishes !

I have lost sight of her !—O, loose thy hold !

PROCIDA.

I cannot part with thee !

FERNANDO.

She will escape me !

PROCIDA.

Heavens, is my strength gone from me ?—Is my child
Stronger than I ?—Can I believe I have dwindled
While he has grown to brawn !

FERNANDO (*bursting away*).

Farewell !

PROCIDA.

He is gone !

And I am desolate in the world again !

O, the fine nature there that's run to waste !

Hark !—They are near the town.—Why, Procida,

Where is thy cause ?—that which was wife, son, all

On earth was dear to thee ? Who roused the spirit

That leads the march of death in progress, now ?

Thou !—Where thy post then ?—here, or at its head,

Directing it ! Forgive me, Sicily,

Forgive me, martyr king !—and, Liberty,

Disown me not ; I ever was thy son !

Away the private care ! The public cause

Engross the heart I once gave up to it,

And now give up again ! Quail, Tyranny !

Up, Freedom !—Claim your rights—and have them, too !

[*Goes off.*]

SCENE II.

A Chamber in the Castle.

Loud knocking outside, repeated two or three times.

Enter from the opposite side AMBROSE *hastily.*

AMBROSE.

Give o'er !—What makes you knock so loud ?

[*Opens.*
Come in !]

LOUIS (*entering*).

The Governor!

AMBROSE.

He sleeps.

LOUIS.

Awaken him!

AMBROSE.

Must I?—Till now he has not tasted rest;
His mind distemper'd by unquiet thoughts,
Things of no substance—visions, which his fancy
Hath conjured up to cheat his senses with;
Gazing on air, as 'twere endued with form,
Sinews and motion; and with silence holding
Discourse, as it could hear, and had a tongue.
Sleep hath but new composed him; I am loth
To abridge her friendly visit.

LOUIS.

Better thou

Than death! Messina swarms on every hand
With signs of ferment. Ere the custom'd hour
The citizens forsake their couches for
The scarcely lighted streets; and frequent pass
From house to house, or here and there in groups
Stand muttering to one another; while
On our patrols, for whom they scarce make way,
Instead of looks of deprecation, scowls
They cast, that talk of blood as openly
As threats of murder. Something is on foot
Which instant wide example may suppress,
Whereto we wait the will of the Governor.

AMBROSE.

I'll call him then.—Soft,—he is here! Observe,

Attired as yesterday, rejecting all
The appliances of sleep !

GOVERNOR (*entering*).

I am the dupe
Of mine own fancy, and I know it ; yet
I am its dupe ! My reason doth give way.
I come from my own chamber, where I stood
Just now in the hall of John of Procida.
I knew 'twas my own chamber, yet it seem'd
His hall ; and at the further end there sat
His wife, or else a spectre in her shape.
She did not breathe, methought, and yet she sate
Her chair erect, and saw ; and glared at me
Until her eye-balls froze me. I come out
Into my antechamber. I am there !
I am sure I am ! Still seem I standing yet
In that abhorred hall with that companion
Of aspect most unnatural, that makes
My flesh to creep and breathing grow so thick
I doubt 'tis air I draw !

LOUIS.

He dreams, although
He seems awake.

AMBROSE.

No—no !—He does not dream !
It is not dreams men see with open eyes.
This mood hath grown upon him since he heard
Of John of Procida. My lord—my lord !

GOVERNOR.

O, Ambrose, is it you ? I am glad you are here.

AMBROSE.

I am, my lord ; and here is Louis too,
Who dreads some ferment in Messina. Scarce
'Tis dawn, and yet the citizens have left
Their beds, and throng the streets with sullen looks,
Threatening disaster to their masters, which
To avert, behoves we force them to keep house,
And make, of the resisting, sharp example.

GOVERNOR.

Take measures as occasion calls for them
Arouse the garrison. Let one and all
Be under arms. Shed no more blood than's needed.

[LOUIS goes out.]

No news of John of Procida ! The face
He saw not ; 'twas the figure only struck him ;
Recalling the impression of a man
He once had seen, but where he could not tell,
Nor who it was, till he at last bethought him
Of John of Procida, then told his thought
Not as a thing of doubt but certainty.
And then the disappearance all at once
Of him he so remark'd, was circumstance
Corroborative. Ever since, my heart
Hath felt a chill like that the body feels
When cold hath smit it to the bone ! so deep,
No art medicinal can draw it out,
And the wretch shivers at the very fire !

AMBROSE.

He is forgetful I am near him. Mark.

GOVERNOR.

Hangs then my fate on John of Procida ?

My heart forebodes it does.—Forebodes it right ?
If so, when he's at hand my doom is near.
As I do live 'tis gone ! Spectre and all !
Ah ! now I see you, Ambrose. Who comes yonder ?
Is't not Le Clerc ?

AMBROSE.

I'd say it was, my lord,
But for those marks of blood ! He spent last night
Some two miles distant from Messina.

Enter LE CLERC, supported by MARTEL and a Soldier.

MARTEL.

Here's
Le Clerc come wounded home. He threw himself
From his horse into our arms, and without word,
Made for the staircase, which he stagger'd up,
As if by superhuman effort and
Made straight for your highness' chamber.

GOVERNOR.

Well, Le Clerc ?
What would you with me, friend ? What has befallen you ?
He strives to speak, but cannot. Voice is fled,
And life is following it. One word, Le Clerc.
He dies in the attempt.—Yes ; he is dead !
Remove him. Good Martel, be on the alert.
Arouse our friends. Look to the citizens !

*[MARTEL and the others go out, bearing the body
between them.]*

Of some dread visitation this must be
The dark but sure forerunner. Death is abroad.
Be sure of it. Yes, Ambrose, death is abroad !
Death !—Death !

LOUIS (*entering hastily*).

My lord, the sentinels upon
The walls hear sounds as of a multitude
Advancing on Messina. Scouts are sent ;
What it behoves us look for, we shall learn
A few brief minutes hence.

GOVERNOR.

Brief, do you say ?
Years are not brief, and minutes now are years !
What of the citizens ?

LOUIS.

Their numbers swell.
They move in masses up and down the city,
Returning dogged silence to our orders
To clear the streets. We wait for augmentation
To drive them into their houses. You do hear ?
Our trumpets sound to arms.

Enter FRANCOIS, conducting PIERRE, much exhausted.

GOVERNOR.

Ay, lustily
They tell their need. What other spectre this ?
Who is't ? He is ours, and yet I know him not.
Who is't, I say ?

FRANCOIS.

One from Palermo, sir,
Whose speed has cost him his good courser's life
To bring unwelcome news.

GOVERNOR.

What tells it, friend ?

PIERRE.

The massacre of every living soul
Of Gallic birth or blood, that in Palermo

Drew breath the day on which I 'scaped from it,
Preserved by feigning death !

MARTEL (*rushing in*).

A whelming flood—

A whelming human flood—comes raging on
Right for Messina. Haste, sirs ! Massacre

Is at our very gates. Flight is cut off.

Resistance is our only hope. Forth !—Forth !

Houses are certain tombs !

[*All go out but the GOVERNOR, who seems transfixed.*

GOVERNOR.

'Tis Procida !

'Tis Vengeance !—Vengeance without mercy !—fierce !—

Implacable ! On every side the sword !

I cannot hope to live—yet cannot die !

Flight—flight—the coward's refuge ! Nothing else

Is left me ! This way leads into the street !

The garden ? Yes, it opes without the walls !

Conscience, 'tis thou, not I !—Except for thee

I would not quail !—The spectre here again !

Again the hall of John of Procida !

Away !—Flight !—Nothing else !—Away !—Away !

[*Rushes out.*

SCENE THE LAST.

The Garden of the Castle—Enter ISOLINE, tottering and breathless—She leans against a tree—Sounds of tumult without, and the noise of martial instruments.

ISOLINE.

Thus far in time—thus far in safety ! Were't

Another stride, ere take it I had dropp'd.
The work is going on ! O, spare my father—
Spare him, and deal with me ! Hark ! Massacre
Has left this quarter free ; within the city
Holding her gory reign. She does not riot
Within the castle yet. He yet may live !
Limbs, hold me up. Don't fail me. Who comes here ?
My father !—Father !

[GOVERNOR *enters hastily and wildly.*

GOVERNOR.

Whosoe'er thou art,
Stop not my way !

ISOLINE.

Dost thou not know me ?

GOVERNOR.

No !
In times like these men know not one another.
Holding together, they together fall,
As men in knots do drown. In scattering
Is chance of safety. Do not hold me, friend.
Let go. Look to thyself. Let every one
Look to himself. He is lost that casts his eye
Upon another's jeopardy. His own
Asks all his care.—Let go !—Away !—Away !

[*Rushes off.*

ISOLINE (*thrown upon her knees*).

He does not know me !—He's my father, and
He does not know me ! He's distracted—mad !
Fain would I follow him, but cannot.—No,
My knees refuse to raise me.

FERNANDO (*rushing in*).

Isoline!

ISOLINE (*springing up by a convulsive effort, and throwing herself into his arms*).

Fernando!—my Fernando!—True to death!

My husband—mine own love!—I die for joy!

And bless thee, my Fernando, for my death!

[*Swoons in his arms.*]

FERNANDO.

Love!—Wife!—Choice pattern of thy partial sex—

My Isoline! She is dead!—she is dead!—she is dead!

GUISCARDO (*entering from the Castle, his sword drawn*).

Fernando!

FERNANDO.

Here, Guiscardo!

GUISCARDO.

Who is she

Hangs swooning on thine arm? Thy bride?

FERNANDO.

My bride!

GUISCARDO.

And dead?

FERNANDO.

And dead!

GUISCARDO.

Set down the carrion, then,

And yield me payment for Martini's death!

I want not odds!—I'll fight thee like a man

For ancient friendship's sake!

FERNANDO.

Fight me, Guiscardo!

GUISCARDO.

Cast down thy load to earth, and draw thy sword.

FERNANDO.

Wouldst murder me?—and if thou wouldst, Guiscardo,
Do it at once!

GUISCARDO.

I'd treat thee like a man.
Wilt thou not throw thyself thy burden down,
And act like one, or must I wrest it from thee
To balk thee of excuse? [Approaching.]

FERNANDO.

You touch her not!
'Fore her dead body do I throw my life
That would not save my own!

GUISCARDO.

Have at thee, then!
[They fight; FERNANDO is wounded.]

ANDREA (*rushing in*).

Hold!—'Tis the son of John of Procida!

GUISCARDO.

The son of John of Procida!

FERNANDO.

Too late!—
Take her! Preserve from insult—pay all honours,—
For her sake, not for mine, and lay us side
By side. I pant for death, and not the life
Would hold my spirit from rejoining hers! [Dies.]

Enter JOHN OF PROCIDA.

PROCIDA.

It is not there!—I came to see his corse,
But not to smite him. No!—I would not stain
This day of freedom with the narrow deed

Of personal vengeance.—To the swords of others
I would have left him, satisfied if they
The debt exacted that was due to mine.
But they, intent on their own quarry, mine
Have suffer'd to escape, and vengeance, now
Balk'd, by its own remissness, of its prey,
Gnashes the teeth in vain !

ANDREA.

Procida !

PROCIDA.

Ho !—Andrea ! What bear'st thou on thy arm ?

ANDREA.

The body of Fernando's wife, although
If this be death I do mistake its hue !

PROCIDA.

Who lies upon the ground ? The Governor ?

ANDREA.

Thy son, O Procida !—She is not dead !
Help here !—Hold off !—You kill'd him !

PROCIDA.

Kill'd my son !

GUISCARDO.

Strike, John of Procida ! He sided with
The enemies of Sicily.

PROCIDA.

He did ;
And he was born her son ! Live !—You did right.
His father says it.—Yet, he was my son !

GUISCARDO.

I knew not that.

PROCIDA.

And had you known it, still

You had done right—I say it—I—his father !
And yet he was my son !

ISOLINE (*recovering*).

My lord !—My husband !—
Fernando !—draw me closer to thy breast !
Hold off !—Who art thou ?—Where's Fernando ?—Who
Is that ?

ANDREA.

Fernando's father !

ISOLINE.

So it is !

And we are safe !—Are we not, sir ? (*Tottering toward JOHN.*)

PROCIDA.

O, Heaven !

ISOLINE.

You will not let them murder us ?—You will not !
You can't ! else Nature have no truth in her,
And never more be trusted !—Never more !
If fathers will not stretch an arm to save
Their children's throats, let mothers' breasts run dry,
And infants at the very founts of life
Be turn'd to stones ! Sir !—Father !—Where's your son ?
Ah, you repulse me not ! You let me come
Closer to you.—Where's my Fernando, father ?
What ! do you draw me to you ?—Would you take me
Into your very bosom ?—There, then !

[*Throws her arms about his neck.*]

Now,

Fernando, what's to fear ?—Now, mine own love,
We shall be happy !—happy !—blessed happy !
Why don't you answer me ?—Where is he, father ?
I left him here ! Where I have been I know not.

I recollect a sickness as of death,
And now it comes again. My brow grows chill
And damp—I'll wipe it! Blood!—What brings it here?
Whose blood is this?

ANDREA.

Blood has been shed to-day.
No vestment in Messina, but you'll find
Some trace upon't.

ISOLINE.

Where is my husband, sirs?
Is this Fernando's blood?—We were together,
And it was here! If death did threaten us
He would be close to me, of his own life
Making a shield for mine! Was he alive,
Were he not here?—Not here, he must be dead,
And this must be his blood!

PROCIDA.

Remove her, friend;
Take and remove her hence. I lack the strength.
Her plight, to mine own added, weighs me down.
She must not see his body; 'tis her life
That I feel fluttering next my breast just now
As ready to take wing. 'Twere certain death
To look upon him.

ISOLINE (*to* ANDREA).

No, I will not hence!
You will murder me. I am safe here,—am I not?
Am I not, father? Father!—Where's my father?
He did not know me! He did shake me off!
He fled me! You are all my father now!
But there's Fernando, too!—You are not weeping?

You are !—Don't weep !—I'll dry your eyes for you !
The blood again !

PROCIDA.

We must remove her hence.
Come with me, child.

ISOLINE.

Child !—Do you call me child ?
Child is a sweet name !

PROCIDA.

Come, my daughter.

ISOLINE.

Daughter !
That's sweeter yet than child. Nothing so sweet
After the name of wife ; but wife's not sweeter
Than husband.—Husband ? That's the sweetest name
Of all ! My husband is your son ! and "son"—
There is a sweet name too !—No sweeter name
Than son ! Do you not think so ?

PROCIDA.

Come.

ISOLINE.

I come !

We are going to Fernando,—are we not ?
Sir, fare you well. What's that upon the ground ?

ANDREA.

Where ?

ISOLINE.

There ! You know as well as I ! Stand off ! (*Breaks away.*)
Fernando !—My Fernando ! dead ?—Ay, dead
Indeed, when I do call on thee, and thou
Return'st no answer !—My Fernando !—Dead !
Ah ! it is well ! Here's silence coming too
For me, love. I do feel the frost of death

Biting my limbs, and creeping towards my heart.

Colder and colder—all will soon be ice.

'Tis winter ere its time ! but welcome, since

'Tis shared with you, Fernando. Mercy, Heaven

'Tis kind—'tis pitiful to suffer me

On thy dead lips to breathe my life away.

[*Dies.*

ANDREA.

Let me conduct thee hence, O Procida !

Grief doth benumb his every faculty.

STEPHANO (*entering with others*).

Where is John of Procida ?

ANDREA.

Behold him.

STEPHANO.

Health

To thee and to Messina, which, to-day,

Through thee, beholds her grievous yoke thrown off.

All Sicily is free ! From north to south,

From east to west she garrisons herself,

And tyrants rule no more !

ANDREA.

Forgive him that

He heeds you not. That body is his son's

You see him gazing on !

STEPHANO.

We know his heart !

THOMASO (*entering with others*).

Health, John of Procida ! The enemy

That sack'd thy castle, and who yesterday

Held rule in Sicily, the Governor,

Flying from death did meet it from this man,

Who knew him, intercepted him, and slew him.

ANDREA.

All enmities, all loves, are swallow'd up
In the deep gulf of sorrow for his son.

CARLO (*entering with others*).

Where is our chief?

ANDREA.

You see what's left of him.

CARLO.

The admiral
And captains of the fleet have disembark'd
To swell the general joy ; and, yonder, come
Our ancient magistrates, their offices
Suspended long, resumed to pay their debts
To John of Procida !

Enter MAGISTRATES, &c.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE.

Di Procida

The liberator—so we hail thee—such
Thy deeds declare thee better than our words !
For us and for our children at our hands,
Whose act our sovereign master will approve,
Most poor return take for most rich desert,
And be the Governor of Sicily !

[*The whole Assembly shout and applaud*—JOHN OF
PROCIDA *weeps*.]

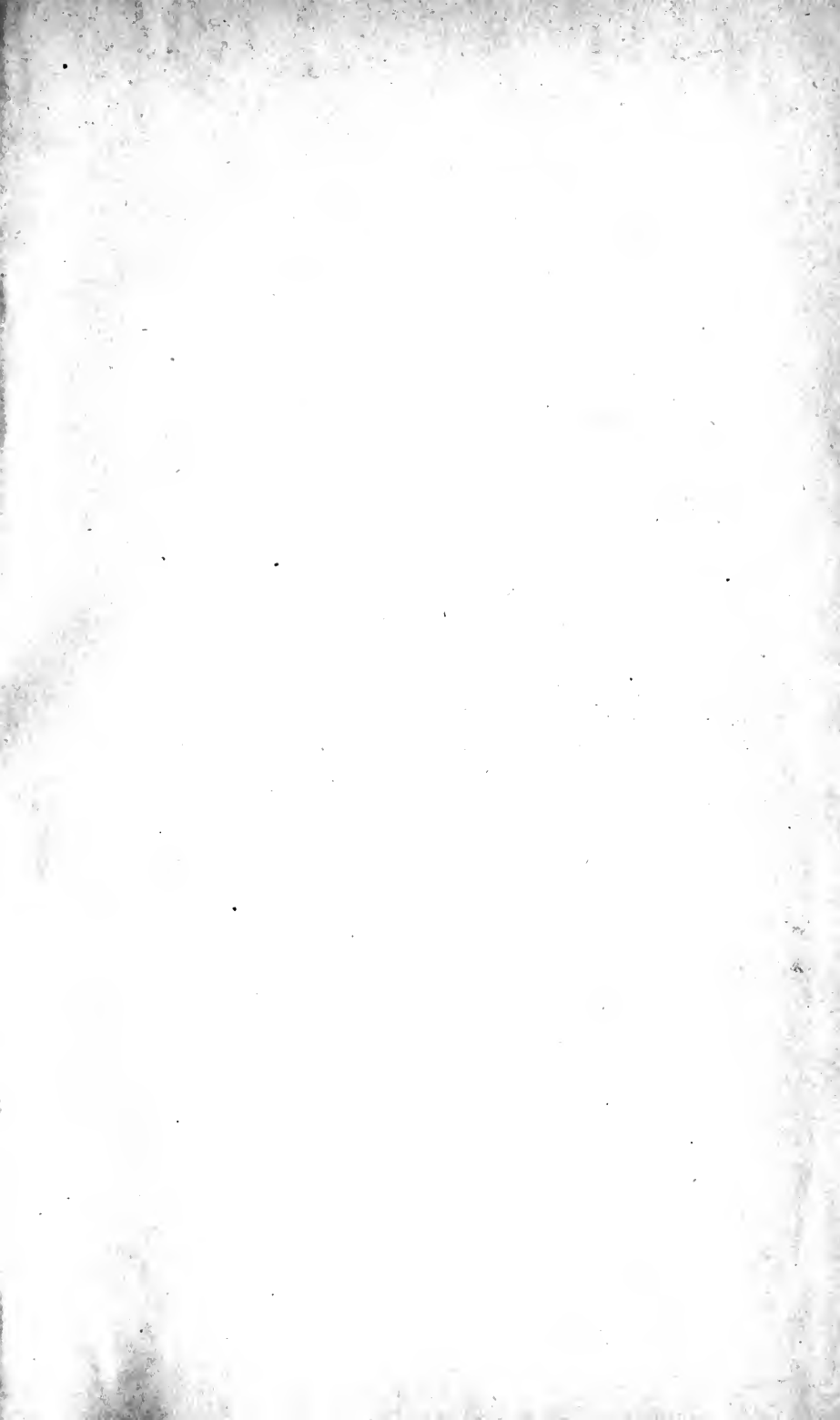
PROCIDA.

Forgive me—I'm a father—there's my son !

END OF THE TRAGEDY.



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